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James Lence.



MORNINGS WITH MAMA.

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THIRD SERIES.

ORNINGS WITH MAMA:

OR

DIALOGUES ON SCRIPTURE,

FOR

YOUNG PERSONS

FROM

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TO
THE REVEREND DR CHALMERS,
THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE,
WITH SINCERE RESPECT AND ESTEEM,
INSCRIBED BY
THE AUTHOR.

INTRODUCTION.

IN soliciting for a Third Series of "MORNINGS WITH MAMA" some measure of that maternal indulgence which has been her stimulus to the resumption of a pleasing task, the Authoress has little to express, save grateful acknowledgments for past encouragement, and an humble hope of continued usefulness.

The portion of Scripture embraced by the present course of reading has been selected, not merely from its immediate connexion with that which preceded it, but as the express suggestion of very eminent advisers;—from an impression on their minds, as well as on that of the writer, that it was peculiarly liable to misconstruction by the young or uneducated, and susceptible of much elucidation, of a plain and profitable nature.

If less of *direct* spiritual improvement shall be found deducible from it than from the highly typical pages of the preceding Mosaic record, enough, it is hoped, of reflected light will have been shed by them on this more neglected portion of the same Sacred Word, to justify its selection; and to furnish the mind of the young with a

simple defence against the shallow sophistries, of which the books now explained have been made the special objects.

The Authoress will not deny, that, stimulated by the wholly unlooked-for character of utility ascribed to her little work by a class of Bible students, more advanced than the mere juvenile ones for whom it was originally intended, she has occasionally (when led to dwell on subjects of Jewish polity or ritual, somewhat beyond *their* comprehension) had in view the solution of difficulties experienced by those humbler readers of Holy Writ, to whom the higher authorities she has presumed to call to her aid are for the most part inaccessible or unknown.

If, in times when so much of intellect and activity is fearfully enlisted in the atrocious design of perverting or depreciating Scripture, the following pages may induce one youthful waverer to continue steadfast in the "good old paths," or disarm the malice of a single scoffer, the privilege will be felt as more than a compensation for that "labour of love," on which the blessing of a God of "Love" is, in all humility, implored.

MORNINGS WITH MAMA.

THIRD SERIES.

INTRODUCTORY DIALOGUE.

MAMA. My dear Mary, we are about to commence another course of Scriptural reading, and, much as your last judicious selection would encourage me to refer its subject entirely to yourself, I am inclined to hope you will agree with me in the propriety of filling up, by a continuation of the history we last read, the chasm which would otherwise occur in our knowledge of the affairs of the Israelites, from the death of Moses to the accession of David. Had I, when I drew your attention to the too much neglected book of Kings, contemplated any regular series of future scriptural conversations, we should not (as was lately the case) have had awkwardly to reascend to the fountain-head of the history of Israel in Egypt, after tracing it to its disastrous conclusion in judgment.

of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel, several periods with which (though in an inverse order you have I trust been made profitably acquainted). Nor shall we, I hope, with the blessing of God, have reason to regret the expediency which directs our present attention to this also undervalued portion of Holy Writ. That of the successors of Moses may lose per se nothing of interest, in the want of his eloquence, and of majesty in the absence of direct miraculous commission; but, like inspired writings, it is full of solemn displays of the greatness and goodness of God. Nor are there want of remarkable instances which it contains of the power of God in working deliverance for his people, by the instrumentality of obscure and insignificant human instruments. It is wonderful and instructive than the manifestations of immediate Divine interposition which pervade the books we lately perused. On the contrary, while, in the fallibility, and often wickedness of those warriors against whom God was so often "rained down" his

y, and avenge the wrongs of his people, to be a nearer resemblance to the ways by which he now mysteriously works in the world. In, our reverence cannot fail to be enhanced—that wisdom which bends to its purposes our wills and affections of sinful men,” which keth the sins and follies, no less than the of man,” reluctantly to “praise Him.” This will so soon and satisfactorily appear, to concile you (if indeed you had any other the subject) to the choice I have this time in myself.

x. Indeed, Mama, you are quite right. I never feel as if I had heard enough just now of the Israelites, and wished to have gone, for me, to the New Testament. But I can hear explained far oftener in church, and am less to forget or misunderstand it; and I see it to be silly not to know what became of them the long time they lived in Canaan, before the days of Moses and David. You have more or less about *him* ever since I was

A. Yes, Mary, but now that you are older, you will wonder in what a different and edifying light circumstances in his history that of others, will appear to a mind now together unfamiliar (as you lately, and I

trust *truly*, told me) with either the majesty and holiness of God, or the inconsistency and fallen nature of man.

Let us bear these two great truths in view throughout this, as well as all other portions of His holy word, and before their illuminating influence obscurity will vanish, and the counsels of Omnipotence be made to shine like the path of those whom its Spirit guides "more and more unto the perfect day."

MORNING FIRST.

LESSON.—Joshua, Chapters i. and ii.

AMA. Our last course of reading terminated, and no doubt remember, with the death of the faithful, though not unerring, servant of God, Joshua. Do you recollect the singular circumstances under which that event took place?

ARY. Oh! yes. After he had gone up into Gibeon to obtain at God's command to die there, "He laid him in a valley in the land of Moab, and Joshua knew the place of his sepulchre;" and you will observe it was for fear of idolatrous reverence that he was so paid to it.

AMA. Such is universally supposed to have been the reason; and the supposition is corroborated by a mysterious passage in the epistle of Jude, which (by one of those transient glimpses into the world of spirits, which cannot fail to give rise, in our bosoms, to an awful sense of its encompassing though unseen influences) it is said the archangel Michael "contended with the devil about

the body of Moses." But, even to mere human apprehension, there is something very touching in the care exercised, through the ministry of angels, over the inanimate remains of His servant, by that Almighty guardian whose miraculous preservation of his helpless infancy we have so often dwelt on with delight. Let both remind us of the gracious protection still extended, from the cradle to the grave, over even the humblest servants of the same heavenly master.

But since there was no human witness of the lawgiver of Israel's decease, how does it appear to have been made known to his successor?

MARY. God himself revealed it to Joshua, saying, "Moses my servant is dead."

MAMA. Do you remember what eminent services in the cause of Jehovah had elevated Joshua to the leadership of God's people, and final conquest for them of the promised land?

MARY. Mama, he was always ready to stand up for God, and, when most of the other spies disheartened the people, he and Caleb courageously told the truth, and bade them "go up into the good land and possess it."

MAMA. Very well remembered, and certainly the chief cause of his future pre-eminence in Israel. But he had early distinguished himself as a warrior in the defeat of the Amalekites; and his at-

tendance from his youth on the person of Moses, must have tended admirably to fit him for the more spiritual part of his new and important office. In what terms was he solemnly invested with it by God ?

MARY. He was commanded to arise, and go over Jordan with the people, and divide for them an inheritance the land which God swore unto their fathers to give them.

MAMA. Right ; this constituted the substance of the commission conferred on him. What was the encouragement to, and condition of, its fulfilment ?

MARY. God was to be with him as he had been with Moses, and never to fail or forsake him ; only Joshua, on his part, was to be “ strong and of good courage,” and never turn to the right hand or left from the law of Moses, but meditate on it day and night, that he might do it ; and *then* his way was to be prosperous, and God would give him “ good success.”

MAMA. A clear and succinct summary, my dear, of the words before you, and one with which I am well pleased, as shewing that you are capable, by attention and practice, of digesting and condensing what you read. May you, in so doing, by the blessing of God, make its *spirit* as well as *substance* your own ! Did Joshua, thus com-

manded and encouraged, a moment hesitate to advance?

MARY. Oh! no. That would have been very unlike him. On the contrary, he told the people boldly, that in three days they should pass over Jordan to possess the land. If they had listened to him once before, Mama, they might have been in it forty years ago.

MAMA. Do you know why he particularly addressed the Reubenites, Gadites, and half tribe of Manasseh? I don't think we read the chapter in which it was agreed that they should retain (as peculiarly fitted for flocks and herds), the district on the further side of Jordan,—holding themselves, at the same time, bound to pass across it to assist their brethren also, in gaining possession of *their* inheritance.

Did they now adhere to this equitable and brotherly arrangement?

MARY. Oh, yes! willingly; and they said “they would hearken to Joshua in all things as they had hearkened to Moses.” Mama! this was not saying much.

MAMA. No: but the near view of the promised land seems henceforward to have removed (though not in the most meritorious way), the sinful disposition to revolt against authority which had hitherto characterized the Israelites. In those

tribes who had already actually enjoyed the fruits of the promise, distrust would have been as foolish as criminal, so it is no wonder *their* concurrence in the commands of Joshua was prompt and decided.

MARY. But why did Joshua himself send out spies to search the land? I thought the people's doing so before, was distrustful of God, and so punished.

MAMA. It was, and *therefore* punished; especially as its result served but to confirm the distrust it ought to have utterly removed. But Joshua's search for intelligence was doubtless dictated by a very different spirit, and merely designed to discover the weak points of a city, of God's miraculous designs in the overthrow of which, he was not yet aware.

Before proceeding to the interesting account of the escape of the spies from Jericho, let us see if we cannot remove the slur, perhaps unduly cast, on the character and profession of their courageous hostess, by the unfortunate correspondence of the Hebrew word for persons keeping houses of public entertainment, with that denoting women of abandoned character; which last it would be difficult to suppose justly applicable to one, not only a chosen instrument of safety to God's persecuted servants, but herself a monument of redeeming love, and classed by an Apostle with the

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most eminent examples of faith under the Old Testament dispensation. We are the more confirmed in our charitable conjecture, by the knowledge that Rahab afterwards married Salmon, a prince of Judah, and that King David having descended from him, our blessed Lord did not disdain to number among his ancestors "according to the flesh" this Canaanitish heroine.

How did she act on being summoned by the King of Jericho to surrender her lodgers to his vengeance?

MARY. She hid them, Mama, and that was both right and bold; but I am sorry she told a lie about them.

MAMA. It is always distressing to an upright mind to falsify or distort the truth; but if ever deceit is pardonable, it must be when its double object is to save the innocent, and further the counsels of Omnipotence. Without some such subterfuge, Rahab could not, humanly speaking, have long screened her guests from the search of an enraged tyrant; to whom, being convinced on divine authority that his "kingdom had already departed from him," she probably felt released from all duty and allegiance. This latter persuasion, it was no doubt, which palliated, nay sanctified, her whole course of dissimulation; from which I am glad, however, to find your love of truth recoiled, and which we must beware, as in

other cases recorded in Scripture, of "wresting to our own destruction," by unauthorized imitation of what is rather connived at, or permitted, than enjoined.

In Rahab's conduct, however, sanctioned as it is by the applause of an Apostle, we must look for higher and deeper grounds of approbation, and we can only find them, with Paul, in the "faith" which first enabled her to discern, in the conquests of the Israelites, the "finger of God;" and then impelled her to flee, unhesitatingly, to the refuge, which, even amid the utter destruction of an idolatrous city, *His* protecting arm could (and faith told her would) infallibly provide. In this, and this alone, she is held up as a model for imitation; and well would it be for thousands in our professing land, were the only sure test of inward conviction, viz. a life of active and devoted obedience,—as conspicuously displayed in the sight of their brethren, as the scarlet line, the symbol at once of hope and safety, in the window of this believing woman of Canaan!

MARY. Mama, the roof of the house seemed a very public place to hide the men in. You have told me they were flat, and used often for sleeping on; and the Bible mentions for praying also, and many purposes.

MAMA. The simple and scantily furnished

dwellings of the East, my dear, afford small choi of places of concealment; and the appropriati (a very common one with the lower ranks) Rahab's roof to purposes of domestic econom was calculated to divert suspicion. But, Ma let us attend to the deeply instructive terms which the mistress of this humble mansion a nounces to her guests her unalterable convicti that the " Lord had given them the land." H she, think you, any supernatural revelation to th effect, or any means of instruction beyond. t stupendous language of miracle and Almight power?

MARY. None that we know of; indeed s only says, " we have *heard* how the Lord dried the waters of the Red Sea," &c. &c.

MAMA. And did all who " heard" it arrive the same blessed and salutary conclusion?

MARY. It does not appear they did; and y she says " *their* hearts did melt," as if every bo was afraid.

MAMA. Mary, the " devils believe and treble;" but, alas! they neither repent nor chang In *all* the men of Jericho, it is said, " no coura remained," because of the Israelites; yet, in o woman alone, of that countless multitude, c saving fear arise of Him, whom something wh pered to her, must be " God in heaven above a

earth beneath;" or holy courage spring from it to embrace his service and cast in her lot for ever among his people. So it is, Mary, at this day, and among ourselves. The miracles of providence and grace float unheeded on the ear of thousands—cause perhaps even the unregenerate heart transiently to swell or imperfectly to melt—but in one alone, perhaps among them, do they produce that decided passing from death unto life, that choice of the "better part which shall never be taken from her," which marked for the admiration of generations unborn the character of Rahab.

What amiable solicitude, naturally enough to be expected from a temper and disposition like her's, did she manifest for the safety of others?

MARY. She begged the spies, when the town should be taken, to save alive her father, and mother, and brethren; and she made them "swear by the Lord," as if she had been an Israelite already.

MAMA. Who is it that says, Mary, "All are not Israelites that are so according to the flesh, but circumcision is that of the *heart* whose praise is not of men but of God?" Such was the religion, though yet imperfect, of Rahab. But was compliance with her petition promised without corresponding conditions?

MARY. No, no: she was not only to keep

secret all that had passed between her and the spies, but to bring all her kindred home to her own house, and bind a scarlet line for a token in the window.

MAMA. It is edifying to observe how constantly, throughout Scripture, even temporal deliverances are made to depend on the performance of some outward, and apparently insignificant, condition. God could as easily without it, have shielded Rahab's dwelling from the conquering armies of Israel, as the houses of their forefathers in Egypt from the fury of the destroying angel. But the blood sprinkled on the door-post of the one, and the scarlet line bound in the window of the other, must denote the *obedience of faith* before safety could, in either case, be expected or insured; and observe, in both cases, departure out of the shelter of the *sole refuge provided*, was threatened with a fate, chargeable justly on the transgressor's own rashness.

By what simple means was the escape of the spies at length effected?

MARY. They were let down over the wall by the very scarlet line which was afterwards to be hung in the window. I am sure they would remember it again!

MAMA. Do *you* remember any other similar escape recorded in Scripture?

MARY. Yes : that of St Paul from Damascus, only he was let down in a basket.

MAMA. Either of them precarious and perilous methods, unless rendered safe by the special blessing of Heaven ! But did the imminent dangers they had passed through damp, the courage, or influence the report, of these brave men ?

MARY. Oh, no ! instead of lying, like the former spies (who had never been in any danger at all), they only despised it, and said, “ Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land, for all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us.”

MAMA. Would, Mary ! that in estimating the power and malice of our spiritual enemies, we could, in the strength of our God, arrive at the same blessed conclusion ! In the mean time, let the history we have read impress on us two important convictions, the one—that in the case even of favoured Joshua, and the chosen people over whom he presided, it was only to continuance, unswerving and unconditional, in the way of God’s commandments, that success was either promised or vouchsafed ; the other—(from the acceptance of Rahab) that God is no respecter of persons, but that in every land where gospel light has not yet shone, “ he that *feareth Him* and worketh righteousness is accepted of Him.”

MORNING SECOND.

LESSON.—Joshua, Chapters iii, iv, and v.

MAMA. The beginning of our reading to-day, shews us Joshua in the character of a chosen and worthy servant of God—acting on the directions and encouragement his Holy Spirit had vouchsafed to dictate and bestow. On what particular morning is it said he “rose early” to his pious and arduous task?

MARY. Let me see—it must have been on one of the three days within which God had told him the people were to cross over Jordan. How far had they to go from Shittim to get to it?

MAMA. About seven miles; so we may conclude one day sufficed for the journey and subsequent passage. Indeed we are expressly told that it was “after three days,” that, like his predecessor Moses, Joshua issued orders for that previous sanctification of the people with which extraordinary manifestations of Divine power among them was usually ushered in. Do you

remember any other time when they were especially desired to "sanctify themselves?"

MARY. Yes; before the giving of the Law on Sinai.

MAMA. And does not the impressive reason assigned here—"For to-morrow the Lord will do wonders among you"—remind us of the sublime confidence of Moses, when, on the brink of the Red Sea, he bade his countrymen "stand still, and see the salvation of their God?" None but inspired leaders could, without the grossest presumption, have used similar language.

By what hallowed symbol of the Divine Presence was their march this time to be guided and secured?

MARY. The Ark of the Covenant was to be carried by the priests, before them. But why was the pillar of a cloud that used to shew them the way in the wilderness, taken away?

MAMA. Probably because the approach to a cultivated and inhabited country superseded its beneficent office—but more obviously still, because the "glory" of which it was the external and temporary manifestation, had, on the removal of the "*Tabernacle* of God" without the camp, permanently descended to that chosen sanctuary, and of this "glory" the Ark was now the visible symbol and residence. What should we learn from the *lofty station* here assigned to the "Law and

Testimony" of God, and the reverential deference with which it was to be followed by an observing and obedient people ?

MARY. I suppose that God guides us still by his commandments (which you know were laid up in the ark), and would have us to look up to and follow them all our lives.

MAMA. Very well, indeed ; and the precise inference to be drawn from the impressive order of march enjoined on the Israelites. The parallel might indeed (were it useful) be pursued farther. The precepts and testimonies of God, upborn by his faithful ministers, still marshal us on our way to the heavenly land of promise ; the passage into which, of one "greater far" than the Levitical priesthood, affords our best and only title to enter in his train. But by what gracious assurance did God corroborate and reward the active obedience of Joshua ?

MARY. "This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that as I was with Moses, so will I be with thee." And so he must have done, Mama, or else the priests and people would not have believed Joshua ; when he told them to go and cross a great river dry-shod, as they had done the Red Sea. How broad was the Jordan when they crossed it ?

MAMA. Its usual breadth is about twenty

yards ; but in the time of its overflow, modern travellers tell us it bears marks of a far more widely extended course ; and that it was, at such seasons, deep and formidable, the phrase (almost proverbial in Scripture) of the “ swellings of Jordan,” sufficiently attests. When does our chapter say this overflow took place ?

MARY. “ All the time of harvest.” This seems an odd time, mama ; summer is very dry here, and more so, one would think, in Judea !

MAMA. And so it is, Mary ; but “ barley harvest,” the one meant here, when the inundation annually occurs, is in these countries early in spring, (as we may gather from its *preceding* the Passover) when the melting of the snows of Mount Lebanon, at the foot of which the Jordan rises, naturally and obviously occasions it. Of this we may be sure, that so apparently unfavourable a period was not undesignedly chosen for the passage of Israel, by Him whose object was to magnify Himself in their eyes, and in those of the surrounding nations. Joshua’s announcement of it beforehand, both testifies to this truth, and would remove from the minds of those who witnessed the miracle, all suspicion of natural causes, in the sudden drying up of the impetuous stream.

How was this stupendous miracle performed ?

MARY. “ When the feet of the priests that

bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, the waters which came down from above stood, and rose up upon an heap, and the people passed over, right over against Jericho."

MAMA. What a wonderful corroboration would this corresponding display of Almighty power afford to the faith of a generation, who had only heard "by the hearing of the ear" of the similar passage of the Red Sea! and doubtless for this purpose it was chiefly designed. 'But did the ark of God continue, during the whole passage, to fulfil its gracious office of leading the Israelites across the swelling waters?

MARY. No; it says "the priests that bare the ark stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, until all the people passed clean over."

MAMA. So will it be, let us hope, my dear child, in a figurative sense, with the word and ministry of Religion among ourselves, till the earthly pilgrimage of our race is accomplished; and thus, during the same unknown period, may the "swellings of the heathen" be restrained, as well as that tide of impiety and iniquity by which, in our own day, both are threatened to be swept away!

What remarkable and indisputable memorial did God appoint, to preserve among the Israelites the knowledge of this mighty interposition?

MARY. They were to take twelve stones out of the bottom of Jordan, where the priests' feet had stood firm, and carry them over and set them up, "for a sign to their children in time to come."

MAMA. And was it for their children only, that the gracious provision was designed?

MARY. No, no: "that all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty, and fear the Lord our God for ever."

MAMA. And wonderfully has the Divine intention been fulfilled even to this day, since the most triumphant and unanswerable proof ever brought forward by an uninspired writer* to the authenticity of the Old Testament miracles, is founded on the erection *at the time of the passage itself*, and recognition by every succeeding generation, of these twelve stones, and of the history connected with them. Till such a perpetual witness to *an event that never took place*, can be proved to have been borne by a whole nation of dupes and liars, the testimony of this monument to the Divine origin of Judaism, and (as a necessary consequence) to that of Christianity, can never, thank God! be shaken.

Before quitting the Jordan, can you tell me by what other event, little less wonderful in the eye

* Leslie's Short Method with the Deists.

of faith, than the miraculous passage of the Israelites, its waters have been for ever hallowed to the pious Christian?

MARY. I suppose you mean our Lord's being baptized in them.

MAMA. Yes, Mary; that act of condescension, by which he both left an example to others of "fulfilling all righteousness," and lent his all-powerful sanction to a rite which was to open throughout future ages, the gates of his church and kingdom to "all nations?" It affords one of the pleasing coincidences I have before alluded to, of popular belief with Scriptural truth, that the point assigned by tradition for the miracle in our chapter, bore, so late as our Lord's time, the significant name of "Bethabara," or the *Place of Passage*.

What effect do we find, in the last of our chapters, this miracle to have had on the Canaanite nations?

MARY. "When they heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Issael till *we* were passed over, their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more." Mama—who is it that says "we," here? who wrote this book?

MAMA. It is generally attributed to Joshua, and that it was written by some one who lived at

the same time with him, is put beyond doubt, both from the word "we" here, and from what is said in it of Rahab, viz. "she dwelleth in Israel to this day;" while these very expressions intimate that some time had elapsed between the occurrence of the events, and their being noted down. This, as well as the remarkable correspondence of its style, with that likely to be acquired by a pupil and attendant of Moses, confirm the common supposition, ascribing it to Joshua himself; at that later period of his eventful life, when leisure and tranquillity were afforded for the recapitulation of all the "signs and wonders" of which he, like Moses, had been made the organ or eye-witness.

What ancient rite was he enjoined by God to renew among his countrymen, previous to advancing against their enemies?

MARY. Circumcision, Mama. Because the people who came out of Egypt were all dead, and the children that were born in the wilderness were uncircumcised. Why had their parents left them so?

MAMA. Perhaps by Divine command, or at least connivance (else Moses would no doubt have enforced it), that the submission of a whole nation to this dedicatory rite, might be the more solemn and impressive.

MARY. What did it mean when God said, he had thus "rolled off from them the reproach of Egypt?"

MAMA. Expositors are divided as to the exact meaning of this strong expression; but most suppose that it related to the absence of all distinction, which the long neglect of circumcision had caused between the Israelites and their despised heathen oppressors. As among us, unbaptized is a term expressive of the greatest reproach; so uncircumcised is often, by the Jews, contemptuously used to sum up the whole measure of Gentile iniquity and inferiority. Do you remember any particular instance of this?

MARY. No, though I am sure it often occurs in the Bible.

MAMA. I will remind you of one. Does not David, while yet an obscure shepherd boy, strongly manifest the universal sentiment of his countrymen, when he asks, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the Lord of Hosts?" This will explain to you why circumcision is here said to remove a "reproach;" a feeling which the significant name of "Gilgal," or "rolling," would tend to perpetuate among the Jews. What sacred festival did the people, thus prepared and newly dedicated, now celebrate for the first time in Canaan?

MARY. The Passover. Had it been left off, too, all the time in the wilderness ?

MAMA. Not entirely, for we read of two celebrations of it there ; but as no more are recorded, it is supposed the continued rebellions of the people, as well as the absence of "unleavened bread," and other requisites, had suspended it for the last eight and thirty years. Besides, not being yet circumcised (which, we have often remarked, signifies dedicated to God), the people were probably not, as a nation, in a state acceptably to celebrate that holy ordinance. By what change in the external dispensations of God, towards them, were they now enabled to comply with its outward ceremonial ?

MARY. "They did eat of the old corn of the land, unleavened cakes." How did they come by this corn ?

MAMA. Probably by the flight of its owners, to take refuge within the walls of Jericho ; in consequence of that remarkable panic alluded to in the beginning of our chapter ; specially inspired, no doubt, by God, to secure his people against aggression, during the sacred rites of circumcision and the passover. But what striking proof have we, in the next verse, that even Almighty Power does not prodigally resort to miracle, when rendered superfluous by the natural course of Providence ?

MARY. Oh ! the very day after they had eaten the old corn of the land, the manna ceased. I think they must have sometimes regretted their old friend in the wilderness, and missed their "daily bread" from the hand of God.

MAMA. I thought we agreed it was still as directly dealt out to them, and to us, by his providential care, as when it rained in a visible form from heaven. For this first year, at least, of their residence in Canaan, the Israelites could claim no share in the production of the *inherited* plenty supplied to them by their God, through the labour of others ; while the extra fertility of the land every sixth year (preparatory to the Sabbatical rest of the seventh) would remind them, in after times, that the same hand, which every sixth morning covered the earth with a double portion of manna, still regulated the subsistence and crowned the industry of man. But, Mary, by what visible manifestation was the faith of Joshua (like that of Moses,) remarkably confirmed ?

MARY. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua said unto him, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" Mama, I wonder he did not know at once it must be an angel.

MAMA. And, Mary, I wonder you did not know

it must have been a Being far more exalted ! Is the worship of angels any where enjoined or even permitted in Scripture ?

MARY. Oh, no ! I forgot to look forward ; I might have known by the loosing of the shoe off Joshua's foot, that God must have been in the place, as He was in the burning bush.

MAMA. Very right ; but have we any instance in the Bible of the Father assuming a human shape, or appearing, even under the etherial symbol of a flame of fire, to the eyes of any, the most privileged mortal ?

MARY. No, Mama. " No man hath seen God at any time."

MAMA. Hence you see it follows as a necessary consequence, that the " Captain of the host of the Lord," whom Joshua, unrebuked, fell on his face and worshipped, and whose presence rendered " holy" the ground on which He stood, could be no other than the glorious and Eternal Son of God ; the same " Christ," whose " reproach" Moses, after his manifestation in the bush, preferred to the " treasures of Egypt ;" and who, under the corresponding title of the " Captain of our Salvation," still leads on to certain victory all who, under his banner, and clad in his immortal panoply, " fight the good fight of faith." Convinced of this great truth, and none in the word

of "Him who cannot lie," is surer, shall we not be inexcusable if we fail to draw encouragement from the success which henceforward crowned the arms of the Israelites under Joshua? The extermination of the Canaanites is but a foretaste of the "destruction from the face of the Lord and his anointed," of his and our enemies; the planting of Israel in the promised land but a "shadow of good things to come," in store for the faithful soldier of Christ. And when we remember that this animating vision was vouchsafed in immediate connexion with the commanded duties and solemn ordinances of religion, let us be found, like Joshua, "fervent in spirit serving the Lord," if we would share his encouragement or partake of his success.

MORNING THIRD.

LESSON.—Joshua, Chapters vi. and vii.

MAMA. Few parts of Scripture, my dear Mary, afford, within the limited compass of our present day's reading, equally striking and direct alternations of success and defeat, with those experienced by the Israelites, as the immediate consequence of Divine favour, or its merited withdrawal. And deeply does it concern *us* also, to explore the hidden recesses of our own hearts, to search out, and expel, if possible, the lurking evil, under whose paralyzing influence we may be, even at an advanced stage of our Christian warfare, "sore let and hindered," nay, sometimes shamefully defeated, before spiritual enemies apparently the most inconsiderable. But that we may do this the more effectually, let us contemplate the wonderful circumstances attending the fall of Jericho.

In what condition is that city represented to have been at the beginning of our chapter?

MARY. "Straitly shut up, none went out and

none came in ;" just as you once told me (in the cases of Samaria and Jerusalem), all besieged towns are.

MAMA. And what was, in those cases, the consequence ?

MARY. Dreadful famine ; asses' heads sold for their weight in silver, and children eaten by their very mothers !

MAMA. Well remembered ! and similar distress, though in a mitigated form, is a usual aggravation of the misery of all protracted sieges. But this of Jericho was soon to have a miraculous termination. How was this announced to Joshua ?

MARY. " The Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho." Was this the same Divine person who appeared to him in our last chapter ?

MAMA. It is generally supposed so ; indeed, the early part of this one probably forms only a continuation of the heavenly conference. Was Joshua desired by this " Captain of the Lord's Host" to " go up and fight" against Jericho ?

MARY. No, the men of war were only to " compass the city six days," and priests to blow trumpets, and the people to shout, and the walls of Jericho were to fall down flat before them.

MAMA. There is a little more of haste and in-

accuracy than usual, in your attempt to condense in a few words, the solemn repetitions of this wonderful prediction. You have not only misplaced the general *shout*, which was to be reserved for the miraculous triumph of the seventh day, but have actually omitted the chief visible agent in the fall of the city itself.

MARY. Oh! I see now, I foolishly forgot the Ark! If it had not been there, I daresay the walls would never have fallen at all.

MAMA. It is not likely so stupendous a miracle would have been unattended (especially in the sight of a carnal people,) by some such visible symbol of the Divine Presence; and so sensible was Joshua of its essential nature, that he places it first in his directions to the priests, though only incidentally mentioned in the supernatural command. How was the Ark of the Lord to be preceded?

MARY. Seven priests were to bear trumpets before it, and "him that was armed" (I suppose the soldiers) was to pass on before it also.

MAMA. And who were to come after, in this wonderful procession?

MARY. "The rereward." What does that mean?

MAMA. It is supposed the unarmed multitude, who usually, in all marches, shelter themselves

behind the protection of the advanced warriors; and who *here*, under the double safeguard of valour and religion, must have felt safe indeed! They were probably made partakers of the triumph of Jehovah, expressly to show that the "battle" in this, as in many similar cases, was not exclusively "to the strong."

But what do you suppose were the feelings of the besieged, while witnessing the peaceful inaction, and apparently futile ceremonies of their enemies?

MARY. I daresay they laughed at them, and began to think they should get off, after all.

MAMA. Is it not thus, Mary, with many, whom the long-suffering of God, and mysterious delays of his Providence, embolden in fancied security? Not greater, nay, not half so great must have been the surprise of the people of Jericho, when, at the blast of the priests' trumpets, and the shout of Israel, their boasted ramparts were annihilated, and destruction burst in upon them like a flood, than will be those of the mass of God's enemies, when, "with the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God," every "refuge of lies shall be swept away," and their unhallowed heads exposed to the full fury of the wrath they have so long insulted and defied!

Was there any thing peculiar in the time chosen

by Jehovah, for this "hallowing of His great name in the sight of the heathen?"

MARY. It was on the "seventh day" that the walls fell down. You let me read in Josephus, lately, about the Jews' wars, and I thought they were so strict, even in his time, that they would rather be killed than fight on the Sabbath day.

MAMA. I am very glad you observed this remarkable adherence to the "letter" of their law, when its "spirit" had long since departed. But the mandate of one, whose own authority we have for saying that He is "Lord of the Sabbath," dispensed with the legal enactment here, when God's glory was the immediate object; just as, in after times, He graciously did for man's relief and advantage. What malediction did Joshua prophetically lay on the rebuilders of the city, even before its proud walls had been levelled by the arm of Jehovah?

MARY. The city was to be "accursed to the Lord;" and it says the man who tried to build it, was to "lay the foundation of it in his first-born son, and set up the gates in his youngest." It all happened, Mama; we read about it. Hiel the Bethelite, was the name of the man, and he really lost his two children.

MAMA. So certain is every contemner of even the most inscrutable of God's purposes, to meet

with chastisement here, or hereafter ! But by what yet more fearful penalties does Joshua seek to deter those who might wish to "take of the accursed thing," that is, purloin any part of the spoil which God had claimed for Himself, while He devoted its guilty possessors to destruction ?

MARY. "Lest ye make *yourselves accursed*, and make the Camp of Israel a *curse*, and trouble it."

MAMA. Bear this strong injunction in mind when you are tempted to shudder (as human nature will do) at the terrible judgment which overtook its transgressor.

How was the dreadful sentence, gone out against the impure and impenitent inhabitants of Jericho, at length executed ?

MARY. "They utterly destroyed all that were in the city, men and women, young and old." If you had not explained to me before, why God made the Israelites punish these wicked people, rather than the fire and brimstone, which spared nobody, in Sodom and Gomorrah, one would have thought them cruel in not sparing the women and children.

MAMA. Of the many answers to this not unnatural, and often-repeated objection (which, however, all must see would apply equally to the indiscriminating havoc made by national calamities in all ages of the world), I shall content myself

with the practical one, arising from the infallible consequences which must have ensued, had your benevolent wishes in favour of the "wives and little ones" of the Canaanites been followed up. What must have become of the latter?

MARY. I suppose they would have been brought up among and joined to the Jews.

MAMA. And what would then have become of that word ("not one jot or tittle of which can pass away") by which the possession of Canaan had been specially limited to the posterity of Abraham; if the offspring of the most daring and impenitent of God's enemies had not only been saved from predicted destruction, but placed on an equality with the "heirs of promise?" And if, as some contend, their mothers ought to have been also "saved alive," experience teaches us that *their* first abuse of such mistaken lenity would have been the seduction from the true God of their Hebrew protectors; as well as the infallible education in their own heathen enormities, of the progeny surreptitiously introduced into the polluted tents of Israel.

But let us remark how, even in the instance before us, God "in the midst of judgment remembered mercy." Who remained long after in Israel, its ransomed and grateful monuments?

MARY. Rahab, mama, and "her father and

mother and brethren, and kindred, and all that she had, as the spies had sworn to her." Joshua was too good a man to forget the oath.

MAMA. And she too "strong in faith" to neglect the simple measures pointed out to her, as the sole means of salvation for herself and her relatives. Would they have been safe, think you, had they remained in their own houses, or would even *her* house have been secure, without the scarlet line which marked it out for the object of Divine protection? A protection the more singular and miraculous, as it was situated *on the very wall* of the city, the rest of which, we are told, fell flat to the ground. Do we see in this a visible manifestation of that power of faith and obedience, by which the destruction, in whole or in part, of cities and communities is mercifully averted; and shall we not all be anxious, in our several ways, to contribute by individual godliness, not to our own selfish security only, nor even to that of our families, but to the prosperity and stability of our beloved country?

We must now turn to the more painful and humiliating side of human nature. In what misfortunes did the unworthy conduct of Achan involve *his* country and kindred?

MARY. "The anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel"—and it says "*they*

committed a trespass in the accursed thing." Nobody was guilty, I thought, except Achan.

MAMA. And yet an entire nation, Mary, lost its honour, and many of its members their lives, for the transgression of one among them—a result which can astonish none who reflect, that “by the sin of one man came death into the world;” and which corroborates the view we have just taken of the incalculable national importance of individual righteousness.

On what occasion did God’s “anger” manifest itself?

MARY. Joshua had sent up spies to view Ai, and they came back saying, two or three thousand men would be enough to take it, “because its people were few;” yet *three* thousand “fled before the men of Ai,” and thirty-six were killed, and “they chased them and smote them in the going down.” What a sad change, Mama, from taking Jericho without a blow!

MAMA. Sad, indeed! And what had *caused* the change, Mary? and made the hearts of the people “melt, and become as water?”

MARY. I suppose they thought God had forsaken them, at least I am sure Joshua did, when he “rent his clothes, and fell on his face before the ark till even-tide.” But I think it was sinful in Joshua to say God had brought the people over

Jordan "to deliver them into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy them." He was as bad as the Israelites who said the same in the wilderness.

MAMA. Some similarity in the *form* of exposition in both cases, must not blind us to the great difference of its *spirit*. Joshua only seeks, in deep and sincere humility, to penetrate the sudden and mysterious change in the dispensations of the Almighty, to which, in his ignorance of Achan's sin, he could have no possible key,—and, as in the case of Moses, when similarly overtaken by momentary despondence, observe that the supposed dishonour to "*God's great name* in the sight of the Canaanites," is uppermost in his mind. This it is which distinguishes the pardonable misgivings of God's servants, from the clamours of an unthinking multitude. But how were Joshua's perhaps "unadvised" expressions rebuked by Him?

MARY. "Get thee up, wherefore liest thou on thy face? Israel hath sinned."

MAMA. Aye! there lay the bitter root of national discomfiture, and individual humiliation! *Therefore* the children of Israel "could not stand before their enemies, because they were accursed." And why? What were the aggravations of Achan's sin in the pure eyes of God?

MARY. He had "taken the accursed thing, and stolen and dissembled also."

MAMA. Let us examine separately the black enumeration. The word rendered "accursed" here, we are told can equally bear the acceptation of "dedicated;" and it is in the latter sense that the appropriation of all the "gold, and silver, and brass, in the city, to the treasury of the Lord's house," obliges us to understand it. By converting to his own use any part of this, Achan was consequently guilty of the sin of *sacrilege*, one which all laws, divine or human, have agreed to regard as of peculiar enormity. Stealing (even from a fellow-creature) the law of Moses had utterly prohibited, and of that deceit and "dissembling," by which alone such acts are for a time concealed from man's inspection, we know who is the "father" and author. Can we then wonder that sin, under these heinous forms, subjected the offender to the just wrath of God? The more so, that a warning—solemn as Divine authority could make it—had provided against, and rendered unpardonable, the transgression.

But, to impress its heinousness on a people daily exposed to similar temptations, what were the solemn means resorted to by Him, in whose sight "the darkness is as the noon-day," and who hath said that "nothing is hidden which shall not be revealed," here or hereafter?

MARY. The people were to "sanctify themselves against to-morrow."

MAMA. Stop, Mary! The frequency of that command of late, should make us pause to observe how uniformly personal holiness achieved, or at least aspired at, is made preparatory to Divine manifestations among the Israelites. But what more painful exercise of obedience was to testify, on this occasion, the reality of Israel's sanctification?

MARY. "Destroying the accursed thing from among them," and except they did this, God would not be with them any more.

MAMA. Neither will he link, be assured, among ourselves, His purity with corruption, or His salvation with impenitence! But by what supernatural method was He to make the Israelites spectators of, and as it were partakers in, His own omniscience?

MARY. They were all to be brought up according to their tribes, and God would "take," first the tribe, then the family, and then the household; and *he* that was "taken with the accursed thing should be burned, with all that he had." I know God *saw* who was guilty at the very time; but how would he point him out to others?

MAMA. By lot, Mary—a very common ancient mode of deciding similar matters; but one on which nothing less than the infallible, and openly announced countenance of God, could confer the least portion either of certainty or justice. *To His decision it was considered among the*

Jews a direct reference ; while among later nations, it was perverted (along with its dark accomplices, the " ordeal " and " wager of battle," of which you read in your English history) to the most flagrant and shameless purposes of oppression. But what was its result, as now sanctioned, nay appointed, by Jehovah ?

MARY. After picking out first the tribe of Judah, and then the family of the Zarhites, the household of Zabdi was brought " man by man ;" and Achan, the son of Carmi, the very one who had done the deed, was " taken." Oh ! Mama, how he must have wished he had never seen the " goodly Babylonitish garment," and the " shekels of silver, and the wedge of gold !"

MAMA. And how will thousands, Mary, at the day of judgment, sinking under the same omniscient eye, and the gaze of assembled worlds, wish the " right eye" had indeed been " plucked out, which coveted," and the " right hand" indeed been " cut off," which seized, that " spoil," whose fruit was short-lived pleasure, and its end " everlasting burnings !"

In what mild paternal terms did Joshua exhort the trembling wretch to the tardy atonement of confession ?

MARY. He calls him " my son." How could he speak so to one with whom God was so angry ?

MAMA. Even as the same God has called, aye, shewn himself the "Father" of a race, sunk deeper in transgression than the ignorant Israelite, whose chastisement "He who desireth not the death of a sinner," intended in mercy for the warning of a host of possible transgressors. Did the mild tone of Joshua lead to its designed consequences of penitence and submission?

MARY. Oh! yes; Achan answered, "Indeed, I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel." Mama, why did God not pardon him, when he repented and acknowledged his sin?

MAMA. Does the sincerest penitence turn away the sentence of the law from criminals in our times; nay, does it even free men from the evil consequences of their sins—from sickness, poverty, and ruin?

MARY. Oh! no; but then men cannot tell when it is *real*, and God sees immediately.

MAMA. An excellent distinction, and one which, blessed be God! will not be wanting in the day of final award. But then, and then only, will it be acted on by One whose temporal chastisement is often the truest earnest of future forgiveness. Let us hope it may be so even with the repentant Achan. But by what earthly punishment was God's broken law atoned, and his threatenings awfully vindicated?

MARY. Achan and all belonging to him were

stoned, and then burnt with fire ; and a great heap of stones raised up over him to this day, and the name of the place was called "Achor." What does that mean ?

MAMA. "Trouble," in allusion to Joshua's reproach on Achan's crime, that it had "troubled Israel"—a term used also in his previous warning against it. And did not, think you, dismay and horror run throughout the camp this scene had "troubled," while the stern inquest of the Lord was going on, and none (none save the sinner and the judge) knew on whom the unerring sentence was to fall ? Oh ! Mary, let us remember with awe, that a scrutiny no less strict, unveils to Him who is to be *our* Judge, the "thoughts and intents" of every human heart ; that we may flee with redoubled eagerness to the "blood of sprinkling," which, even from that eye, can blot out every stain, and make the dark record of a life of error shine with the reflected brightness of a Saviour's purity and holiness !

MORNING FOURTH.

LESSON.—Joshua, Chapters viii. and ix.

MAMA. In the beginning of this day's reading, we find that wonderful Being, to whom belong alike the majestic title so often ascribed to Him in scripture, of "Lord of Hosts," and the more endearing one adopted by Himself, of the "Lord God merciful and gracious," renewing to his servant Joshua his former assurances of continued protection and success. What melancholy event had sunk for a time in despondence and discouragement the valiant successor of Moses?

MARY. Oh! the sin of Achan! You know, because of it the people could not take Ai, but ran away like cowards, and Joshua himself lost faith in God.

MAMA. So true is it, my dear, that sins are seldom solitary either in their guilt or consequences. The covetousness of Achan paralyzed, by withdrawing Divine support, the arms and swords of the children of Israel; emboldened by

temporary success the resistance of God's enemies ; and achieved a yet more bitter triumph, by awaking doubt and distrust in the heart of him, so often on former and more trying occasions

“ Among a rebel host
Alone found faithful.”

The offence, however, being removed, and the transgression expiated in the dreadful manner we read of yesterday, what fresh assurances of victory, and directions in its prosecution, did the Lord vouchsafe to Joshua ?

MARY. “ Fear not, neither be dismayed ; take the people of war with thee. See, I have given into thy hand the King of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land.” Mama ! why did God now allow the people to take the spoil and the cattle to themselves, when He had just punished Achan and every body else for taking only a very little at Jericho ?

MAMA. He alone who “ doeth as seemeth Him good in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth,” and “ whose are the cattle on a thousand hills,” could enable me to answer your not unnatural question ! His simple command sufficed to legalize and sanction this great change in the proceedings of his instruments ; but, in as far as his dealings are accommodated to hu-

man apprehension, we may see, in the gracious permission henceforth to appropriate the spoils of the vanquished, a merciful compensation for the recent disgrace with which unoffending Israel had been visited for the transgression of Achan ; as well as a provision for the wealth and prosperous settlement in Canaan of a people of pennyless wanderers, who would have been otherwise utterly destitute of means to cultivate and improve the land of their inheritance. Let us gather from this remarkable change, how completely matters, in themselves indifferent, derive their complexion from the command or prohibition of God ; and learn to answer those who are inclined to cavil at what are called the “ positive ” precepts of His law. To appropriate or destroy the treasures of Jericho and Ai, were actions sinful or meritorious, merely, as they coincided with or transgressed the enactments of Jehovah ; and so is it with the observance of the ordinance of the Sabbath, and other positive institutions of religion, in which scoffers can discern no moral fitness, or “ beauty that they should desire them.” Let *us* read in the history of Achan, the refutation of an error which would dethrone God, and make human reason the judge of His counsels, and the rectifier of His decisions.

But we must return to Ai. How was this de-

voted city at length taken ? Was it, like Jericho, (now that God “ fought against it”) demolished by His mere word and power ?

MARY. No, Mama ; but He himself taught Joshua to lay an ambush behind it ; and, while part of his army hid themselves, the foolish people of Ai, thinking the rest would run away as they had done before, left their city unguarded ; and, when they looked back, found it surrounded by enemies on every side.

MAMA. So is it ever, Mary, with those whom God, for their deeper chastisement, suffers impunity to infatuate ! In the exultation of temporary success, the people of Ai not only despised the men of Israel, but defied the power of God ; which nothing less than their utter destruction could vindicate in the eyes of surrounding nations. In what terms is this recorded in the 28th verse ?

MARY. “ And Joshua burnt Ai and made it a heap for ever, even a desolation unto this day.”

MAMA. The salutary effect of this great triumph on a neighbouring tribe we shall soon have occasion to consider. By what was it immediately followed among the Lord’s chosen people ?

MARY. By Joshua building an altar unto the Lord God of Israel in Mount Ebal.

MAMA. A most natural testimony of pious gratitude for a victory, enhanced by previous de-

feat and humiliation; this even you can acknowledge! But I wish to see if you can equally discern the appropriateness of the solemn recital which then took place, of the "whole law of Moses," its "blessings and cursings," and "every word written therein," "before all the congregation of Israel; with the women and little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them."

MARY. Oh! Mama, there were many reasons, I think, for doing it now. The Israelites were just come into the country God had promised to give them, and it was but fair they should promise to do all He commanded them in return. And perhaps the "strangers, and women, and little ones" might not know exactly what this was, unless they had the words of the law solemnly read over to them.

MAMA. A very good reason why these words of the law, and the important precepts of Moses, should be (as they were) not only rehearsed, but once more graven on stone, as a record against future ignorance or disobedience. But it was not the *commandments* alone of God which were "rehearsed" on Mounts Gerizim and Ebal. Do you remember what the "blessings and cursings" were by which they were awfully enforced?

MARY. Oh! yes, the curses made my very flesh creep when we read them in Deuteronomy;

and I remember you asked me (when I said, I thought the blessings would make *any* people behave well) whether I thought they would have more effect than the hopes of Heaven upon *us* now ?

MAMA. I am glad their contrast has so durably impressed you ; followed up, as we found it, by their exact fulfilment in the subsequent history of the Jews. But a reason suggests itself for their recapitulation here, which has not occurred to you, viz. the entrance of the Israelites on a series of victories and national prosperity, by which (but for these salutary warnings) their naturally proud hearts might have been hardened and elated, and the agency of a higher power lost sight of and forgotten. We are never so prone to “ forget God ” as when his “ candle shines ” brightest on our weak misjudging heads ; or to forget *ourselves*, as when, in His strength, we have advanced a few unchecked steps within the threshold of that gospel inheritance, the barrier between us and which (like the bulwarks of Jericho) must have “ fallen down ” before a power mightier than our own, ere a single son of Adam could have planted his weak and wavering footsteps within its forfeited pale !

But, Mary, how did the catastrophe of Ai affect the surrounding Canaanites ? Were all alarmed by it into penitence and submission ?

MARY. Oh ! no. " All the kings on this side Jordan, in the hills and the valleys, gathered themselves together, to fight with Joshua and with Israel, with one accord."

MAMA. Thus thinking, by their unhallowed league, to defeat the counsels of Him who hath said, " Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished." But before proceeding to its annihilation and dispersion, " like chaff before the wind," in a future chapter,—let us trace the conduct, blameworthy in some respects, yet marked by humility as well as wisdom—of one solitary tribe of Canaan. Did the inhabitants of Gibeon join in the alliance of their exasperated neighbours ?

MARY. No, when *they* heard what had been done to Jericho, and to Ai, they did " work wilily," and they took old sacks and old rent bottles.

MAMA. You know, I believe, of what these latter were then composed.

MARY. Oh ! yes, the Jews kept their wine in skins. You told me so when we read of the " new wine" and " new bottles" in the Gospels. I wonder they preferred any thing so disagreeable as leather to glass !

MAMA. They did so for a very simple reason, viz. that glass was not yet invented. But you may transfer your wonder to the modern Spa-

niards, who persevere in a practice, by which a flavour, repugnant to strangers, is communicated, in goat-skin barrels, to much of their valuable wine.

MARY. It was surely not right of the Gibeonites to take clouted shoes, and worn out clothes, and mouldy bread, to deceive Joshua !

MAMA. Not if you apply to ignorant heathens the rules of gospel morality, or even adhere strictly to that original inscription by the "finger of God" on the heart of man, by which falsehood, of whatever kind, is condemned. But self-preservation has sanctioned deceits less excusable than this of the perishing Gibeonites ; and we must transfer our chief blame in the matter to the precipitance and self-sufficiency of Joshua,—so unpardonable in one who had, in matters both of policy and religion, an infallible guide to resort to.

MARY. It was so cunning of the Gibeonites to contrive such a story, and make it appear true, by the state of their things, that it never could have entered into Joshua's head to suspect them.

MAMA. But it should have entered his *heart* to "take counsel of the Lord," Mary, on so momentous an occasion. *There* lay the grand error of this unholy compact, dictated by pride and

rashness, and consequently disapproved (though tolerated) by Jehovah.

With the "searcher of hearts" and "discerner of spirits" for his counsellor, and the God alike of "battles" and peace for his umpire, what but pride and self-confidence could have prompted Joshua to admit, *on any terms*, into the bosom of God's people, a body of aliens ; for aught he knew (and as the event proved) of the very race he had solemnly sworn to avoid and extirpate ! Had he, in the elation of delegated sovereignty, forgotten *who* indeed was "King in Jeshurun ?" Had he so soon lost sight of the example of "meek" Moses, who, on every emergency, was accustomed to "spread before the Lord" his perplexities and his doubts ? Alas ! Joshua in this case, seems to have felt neither, but to have rushed into the snare with all the incaution of the veriest novice. So is it with the Christian, Mary, when, forgetful of his "Rock" and "strength," he parleys incautiously with disguised transgression, and lets into his breast that foe, who, at one touch of the "sword of the Spirit," would have stood before him in his true colours !

Did you observe a circumstance which heightens the folly of the Israelites, viz. a suspicion having, from the first, crossed their minds, lest they should indeed be negotiating with neigh-

hours and Canaanites? This might have made them pause, and before they ate and drank on terms of friendship with the new comers, prefer an appeal to the Omniscience of God, to the unsupported assertions of lying ambassadors.

MARY. I wonder God allowed such deceivers to be spared and joined to his people; it seems an encouragement to tell lies.

MAMA. Had the incorporation been indeed honourable and complete, your remark might have been just. But observe the degrading terms on which alone they succeeded in purchasing their lives. Because they had so far "feared the Lord and his mighty acts," as to desire admittance within the shelter of his sanctuary, they were not utterly excluded. But because they had crept into it through fraud and deceit, they were condemned (and for *ever*) to its most humiliating and galling servitude. Yet even while fainting "throughout their generations," as "hewers of wood and drawers of water," with the "abomination of lying lips," cleaving to them and their children, they must have had cause to bless the forbearance of God, for the participation of benefits, more precious far than liberty, or even life. What were these?

MARY. By living among the Jews, even as

"bondmen," they would surely leave off idolatry, and learn to worship the true God.

MAMA. Yes, and thus though denied a share in the temporal, partake at least in the spiritual advantages of the people they had trepanned into sparing them. And thus does God, in innumerable instances, bring "good out of evil," though without removing the guilt of those by whom the offence originally "came." Do you remember any later case in which the disobedience of Israel in "saving alive" the Canaanites, and allowing them to share with them the possession of the promised land, had proved beneficial to an individual of that nation; and doubtless to others of her benighted country?

MARY. Was it not a "woman of Canaan," whose daughter our Lord cured, because she besought him so often?

MAMA. It was; and on what was that holy importunity founded, but on a knowledge (though imperfect) of the power and predicted kingdom of the promised Messiah, derived from her residence in the vicinity of the Jews. With the Gibeonites this must have been still more the case, as their share, however humble, in the service of the temple, would bring them in daily and direct contact with the worship of the true God. So you see that in the instance of the treachery of the

Gibeonites, and precipitance of Joshua, as in many others we have had occasion to remark, even the errors of fallible man are made to redound to the extension and furtherance of the kingdom of the Most High.

MORNING FIFTH.

LESSON—Joshua, Chapters x. and xi.


MAMA. We have lately discussed, my dear Mary, with mingled feelings of sympathy and disapprobation, the successful stratagem by which one of the most powerful cities of Canaan (a chief one of the devoted nation of the Hivites) secured to itself not only exemption from the sentence of extermination gone out against those guilty tribes, but partial incorporation into the “commonwealth of Israel.” The probable religious influence of the compact on these surreptitious allies themselves, we have already endeavoured to trace; what was its immediate effect on the neighbouring nations?

MARY. “They feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, and all the men thereof were mighty;” but instead of taking example by it, and trying at least to get their lives spared, these foolish kings turned their anger against Gibeon, and “encamped before it.” This was surely *very unnatural*.

MAMA. Before you pronounce it so, let us transfer from nations to individuals (and those among ourselves) the conduct you find it difficult to account for. When one of a very wicked set of companions is, by the blessing of God, induced to repent, and betake himself to the Divine mercy, does the example quickly become universal among his profligate associates? Do they all immediately acknowledge its expediency, admire, and follow it?

MARY. Oh! no, Mama. I fear the greater part of them only laugh at it, and try to make their companion go back to his old ways; and if he will not be persuaded, then they do every thing to spite and annoy him.

MAMA. Yes, Mary, such as you have described is the "spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience," and such has it been since he first resented on the children of Adam, the anticipated victory of that "seed of the woman," by whom his "head" was, in the "fulness of time," to be "bruised!" But since even Christians may expect to be assailed by the same fury of persecution which awaited the Gibeonites, even they may derive a lesson from the conduct pursued by these partially awakened heathens. Did they attempt, in their own strength, as one of the "royal cities," to repel the attack of their enemies?



MARY. No ; they called upon Joshua, saying, " slack not thy hand, but come up quickly and help thy servants."

MAMA. A petition which, when, similarly threatened for adherence to the good cause, we have only to put up to Him, of whom you know Joshua was in *name*, as well as *office*, a type. Did he promptly comply with the request of the Gibeonites ?

MARY. Yes, he went immediately, and " all the men of war with him ;" and, I daresay, God must have forgiven the Gibeonites their deceit, because they feared Him, else he would not have encouraged Joshua to go up, and defend them.

MAMA. You forget that it was against *His*, as well as *their* enemies ; and in that character did He say of them, " There shall not a man stand before thee." But by what yet more signal tokens of miraculous interposition was this " battle of the Lord against his foes" distinguished ?

MARY. First, Mama, " God cast great stones down from heaven upon them, and they died ;" and, as if that was not enough (though " more died of the hailstones than the children of Israel slew with the sword"), Joshua told the sun and moon to " stand still," and they obeyed him ! Why did he speak so, when a child knows now that the sun never moves at all, and when God could surely *have made it plain* in a moment to Joshua ?

MAMA. But how was Joshua to have "made it plain," not only to a whole army of ignorant Israelites, but to pious readers of the Bible in after times; to whom (till within the last two centuries,) the real motion of the sun was as much matter of certain belief, as his apparent motion still is, of sight and sense to every one of us? It is a popular and frivolous objection which you have been unconsciously urging; but a little reflection will convince you, that to rectify at once the rooted persuasion of a whole unlearned world, as to the mechanism of the heavens (and that too in the teeth of daily ocular demonstration), would have been a far greater stretch of miraculous power than to arrest, for a few hours, (by simply stopping the motion of the earth) the apparent course of the "greater and lesser lights" of heaven.

MARY. I daresay it would, Mama, now that I think of it; for it is hard, even for one who knows better, to help fancying that the sun *does* rise and set. But how did the people manage to keep awake and fight for two whole days instead of one? It was a terrible while!

MAMA. Not if you recollect that in so southern climate, it was a far shorter day than ours, which was thus miraculously procured. Twelve, or at most thirteen hours, was all the supposed addition.

MARY. Mama, it says here that there was "no *y* like it before or after;" now, even I remem-

ber one, when the "sun went back (in Hezekiah's time you know,) ten degrees on the dial of Ahaz."

MAMA. A good remark, Mary, and one for which many an older and wiser champion of the antiquity and authenticity of the book of Joshua would be tempted to thank you; as helping to disprove what infidels have sought to maintain, viz. that it was written in later times, long after the reign of Hezekiah. Now, no one who *must* have recollected that monarch's famous "sign," would have made the assertion you have noticed; and thus do circumstances, apparently immaterial, perpetually confirm the truth and antiquity of Scripture. A curious corroboration of the *two* miracles has been found by learned men in the writings of the heathen author Herodotus, who says that *twice*, in the memory of mankind, had the sun delayed or reversed his course; and, adds he (thus unconsciously testifying that He who is the Lord of Nature, himself presided over its suspended laws,) "without producing in either case, any derangement in the system of the universe."

But we must return to the disastrous consequences of the miraculously lengthened day on the defiers of Jehovah. What was their deserved and unpitied fate?

MARY. Oh! Mama, shocking! Joshua hanged

all the wicked kings that had hid themselves in a cave" for fear of him.

MAMA. Stop, Mary. I could not help being struck with a coincidence. Are there any future enemies of God and His Christ, of whose conduct and catastrophe this incident may profitably remind you? Of what greater conqueror did we say Joshua was a type?

MARY. Of our Saviour, Mama, and I know now whom you mean; you are thinking of the last day, and the wicked calling on the "rocks to cover them from the face of the Lord and the wrath of the Lamb."

MAMA. You are quite right, Mary; and with as little success, alas! will they seek that fruitless refuge, as the kings mentioned here, did the unavailing shelter of the cave of Makkedah! Fanciful interpreters of Scripture might even pursue the parallel, and see in the stern though wholesome severity of Joshua, by which the feet of his captains were placed on the necks of these proud "defiers of the Lord," a foretaste of the future humiliation of His enemies, and the exaltation of those "saints" over whom, for a season, they may have been permitted to triumph.

Did this signal chastisement move to submission any of the remaining Canaanite nations?

MARY. Oh, no! in the very next chapter we

have another league of wicked kings against Israel, just as if nothing had happened.

MAMA. And nothing *can* happen which, to those whom God has judicially abandoned to a reprobate mind, will prove a sufficient or seasonable warning.

MARY. But, though it says here "it was of the Lord to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, that He might destroy them utterly," you explained to me before (about Pharaoh) that God hardened nobody, only left them to themselves, when incorrigibly wicked.

MAMA. And what does the verse go on to infer might have been the result of a different conduct; of humbly suing for peace, like the inhabitants of Gibeon, instead of "coming against Israel in battle?"

MARY. Oh! they might perhaps have "found favour." That seems to say if even Canaanites could have repented, God had not quite shut the door of mercy on them. But we hear of none that did, Mama, and yet there were Canaanites, you put me in mind, living in Judea in our Lord's time.

MAMA. Yes, Mary; in consequence of that very different and unsanctified spirit of toleration by which the Israelites were prompted, not only to spare the lives of God's *impenitent* enemies, but

to make with them unhallowed alliances, to imitate their idolatries, and adopt their vices.

It is the best answer to the favourite remark of scoffers, on the supposed ferocity with which the execution of God's decrees must have inspired the Israelites, that in every possible case these unwilling executioners were but too ready to frustrate or evade their wholesome severity ; while to those disposed to question its necessity, a standing reply has been furnished in the greedy adoption, by these too lenient conquerors, of every error and enormity for which God had commissioned them to sweep the Canaanites from the contaminated earth.

As a proof of this, we have only to remember that it was, in after ages, the worship of that very " Queen of heaven " (or the moon), the favourite goddess of the Canaanites, which chiefly moved God to lead into captivity the descendants of those very Jews ; whom at His command, we have seen the false deity of Canaan compelled to assist, by her " handmaid " light, in the slaughter of her own deluded votaries.

MARY. I am quite satisfied now, Mama, that it was right to cut off those wicked people, but it seems cruel to hurt the poor horses. Why were they to be lamed by the Israelites ?

MAMA. Simply because no less decisive mea-

sure would have prevented that proud and stiff-necked people from placing then (as they afterwards did) all their confidence "in chariots and horses, and not in the Lord of Hosts." It is thought, too, that in the prohibition to "multiply horses," God had the further merciful view of preserving, for the maintenance of the "many thousands of Israel," that large portion of the produce of a limited territory which, in later times (under their ostentatious kings), was usurped by their innumerable establishments of horses. I am glad to call your attention to these particulars, to shew you, (thanks to the learned men who have patiently investigated the subject,) the foundation not only in Divine authority, but even in worldly wisdom, of many of the most apparently insignificant and arbitrary precepts of the Mosaic dispensation. Nothing could appear more natural or immaterial than that the conquerors of Canaan should keep alive and appropriate the horses of their enemies. But if (as we know was the case) by so doing, they either encroached unduly on human subsistence in a thickly peopled country, or, what was far worse, came to substitute "trust in chariots and horses," for confidence in an Almighty defender, even our finite understandings can be made at once to perceive the propriety of the sacrifice. If not a sparrow falls to the ground without the permission of

our Heavenly Father, sure we are, or may be, that the slaughter of a whole host of unoffending animals was not enjoined or permitted but for wise and sufficient reasons.

Let us treasure up and apply the example, when a prohibition, at first as little understood by us, comes athwart our own wayward tastes and inclinations ; and acquiesce in this, as in greater matters, in the arrangements of Him who alone knows " what is good for man all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow."

MORNING SIXTH.

LESSON.—Joshua Chapter xviii. to verse 10th ; Chapter xxi. from verse 41st to the end ; Chapter xxii.

MARY. We have left out some chapters, I see, Mama: they seem full of nothing but names of places, and, for that reason, I suppose, you have made me pass them over.

MAMA. Yes, Mary ; because I thought our time might be more profitably employed, than in the mere enumeration of the districts assigned by Joshua to the various tribes of the children of Israel. Yet, as we learn that this division took place (though by lot) under the immediate sanction and superintendence of God, it will furnish us with a wonderful corroboration of the prophetic spirit imparted by Him to his servants Jacob and Moses, to compare (on the authority of learned men) the exact conformity between the actual inheritance of each of the twelve tribes, and that predicted to them by the dying patriarchs. Look *back and see* what is said at the xlix. chapter of

Genesis verse 11th, of the lot of the tribe of Judah.

MARY. " Binding his sole unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine ; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes. His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk."

MAMA. And how was this strictly fulfilled ? By the assignment to the tribe of Judah of a country renowned for the excellence of its vines and pasture grounds. Go on, before quitting the prophecy of Jacob, and see what it says of Zebulon and Asher.

MARY. " Zebulon shall dwell at the haven of the sea, and he shall be for an haven of ships."

MAMA. And so it was, Mary ; a country abounding in sea-ports, having fallen to the lot of this tribe ; of which Moses also, in his dying benediction, says, it shall " suck of the abundance of the seas." Is there any thing remarkable in Jacob's description of the portion of Asher ?

MARY. " Out of Asher his bread shall be *fat*, he shall yield royal dainties."

MAMA. Which Moses corroborates by this strong expression, " he shall dip his foot in oil." Could any thing more decisively indicate a district, fertile, we are told, beyond others, in the fruit of the olive ? But, not satisfied with this

coincidence, Moses adds of Asher, "thy shoes shall be iron and brass;" both of which productions ancient geographers prove to have abounded in the rich inheritance of Asher.

The comparison, were it necessary, might be pursued through nearly all the separate allotments of which any particulars have come down to us. But we will content ourselves with the most remarkable, because least likely to have a natural fulfilment. What portion did the dying Jacob assign to his two sons, Simeon and Levi?

MARY. None, Mama; how strange! He seems too angry to promise them any thing.

MAMA. Yes; for their cruelty to the Shechemites. And what was the fate predicted alike to both by their incensed parent, at verse 7th?

MARY. "I will *divide* them in Jacob, and *scatter* them in Israel." Did this happen to both?

MAMA. Yes, but in a sense so widely different, that none but He who overrules the expressions of his inspired servants could have ensured its fulfilment by means so opposite. The tribe of Simeon never had a distinct territory allotted to it, but was desired to take possession of the redundant space which partiality had at first assigned to Judah; while the Levites (as we are about to see) were dispersed by the express command of God, as mere "sojourners" amid the other

tribes, as the tenants of His bounty and ministers of His religion. Do you remember how the Levites had prevailed to procure for themselves this "blessing" instead of the "curse" pronounced on them by Jacob ; under which Simeon was permitted to remain a dispersed and "scattered" tribe ?

MARY. Was it because Moses and Aaron were "sons of Levi," and all their children priests ?

MAMA. Not *all* their children surely, Mary ; neither Moses nor *his* descendants had any claim to the priesthood, which remained in the single family of Aaron. It was, on the contrary, by their decided opposition to the *sin* of Aaron,—by their holy immolation of the offenders in the matter of the golden calf, that the tribe of Levi earned the blessing of the Most High, and the privilege of being to their remotest posterity the special people of the Lord ; dispersed as the "salt of the earth" among their brethren, who were enjoined to cherish and entertain them "in all their dwellings," as they valued the favour of their God.

We are now brought by this, I hope not unprofitable review of the substance of the chapters omitted, to the immediate subject of our present reading. What do we learn from the twenty-first chapter ?

MARY. The allotment of 18 cities and their suburbs for the Levites to live in, all over Israel :

instead of a country to themselves, as the rest of the tribes had.

MAMA. To you and me, Mary, it would naturally appear that they were scattered to live "all over Israel," as you call it. But wiser people have remarked that the greater part of the cities thus set apart for the hallowed residence (of the *priests* especially), lay in the portion of territory nearest to, and surrounding Jerusalem—that which in after times comprised the favoured kingdom of Judah ; thus securing to the two faithful tribes an abundant supply of ministers, and preserving the peculiar servants of God from the alternative of either sharing the idolatry of Jeroboam, or being despoiled by that wicked tyrant of their lawful possessions. But that even *he* might not be left "without a witness," to testify against him and his rebellion ; abundance of faithful teachers remained in Israel to render inexcusable his taking upon him to make "*priests*,"—a light thing indeed in one who has already set up an impious manufacture of gods !

The Levites being thus installed without a blow in their peaceful inheritance, the same blessing seems to have rested for a time on all the other tribes. With what happy, and to them most unwonted, state of things, does the first chapter conclude ?

MARY. "And the Lord gave unto them rest round about; according to all that he swore unto their fathers. And there stood not a man of all their enemies before them,—the Lord destroyed all their enemies unto their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass."

MAMA. And thus, let us ever remember, would they have continued to be preserved and supported, had they, on their part, observed the simple, and apparently easy conditions, of fearing and serving the Lord. But what portion of these tribes does the twenty-second chapter represent Joshua as specially exhorting to this course of faith and obedience?

MARY. The Reubenites, and Gadites, and half tribe of Manasseh.

MAMA. And what made *their* adherence to duty and the worship of Jehovah especially precarious?

MARY. Because they lived on the other side of Jordan, far from Shiloh, and surrounded by heathens.

MAMA. Right. Then for what reason had the fighting men among them hitherto accompanied their brethren?

MARY. Oh! you remember Moses told them it would be a shame, now that *they* were comfort-

ably settled, if they did not help the other tribes to conquer their inheritance.

MAMA. I am glad you recollected this ; and I shall rejoice still more, if, in the *spirit* of this truly fraternal conduct, you, my dear child, think it " would be a shame " not to contribute, by every means in your power, to introduce your ignorant heathen brethren to a participation of that far richer " inheritance of the saints in light," with which a merit not your own has already invested *you* ! Seven long years, it is said, the Reubenites and Gadites had abandoned their flocks and herds, and lands and families, beyond Jordan, to fight the battles of the Lord and their brethren, against idolatry and wickedness. You admire and approve them. Never forget that there are, in our days, men, who forego, and for life, all the comforts of home, and country, and friends, to plant the banners of the same Lord on the strongholds of paganism ; and let your prayers at least, if your age forbids more, go along with and assist them.

With what emphatic blessing did Joshua send away these friendly warriors, to their own tents and possessions ?

MARY. " Return with much riches to your tents, and with very much cattle, with silver and with gold."

MAMA. I fear, Mary, you are overlooking, in the temporal reward of their fidelity, the more important condition of these continued blessings. What says verse 5th ?

MARY. " But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the Lord charged you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul."

MAMA. Yes, Mary, "*so*" it is said, and truly, " Joshua blessed them,"—and well had it been for them had the injunction been duly remembered ! But how, in the mean time, did they seek to provide against its being forgotten ?

MARY. " They built an altar by Jordan, a great altar." Mama, I don't wonder the other tribes were angry ; it was just like Jeroboam whom we spoke of just now.

MAMA. Nay, Mary, you run away with it: for not only did they set up no " golden calves" or other idols, in competition with Jehovah,—but the altar was not even intended for sacrifice to *Him*. It was simply (as the verse you quoted has it) an altar to "*see to*"—a mere memorial of their devotion to, and acknowledgment of, the

true God, notwithstanding their estrangement by distance from his sanctuary.

That Israel should have feared otherwise was by no means unnatural, though "going to war" on the subject, without inquiry, with those who had so lately been their own faithful allies, would have been equally rash and unjustifiable. They took a better method—that of a friendly embassy; and I know of few facts in Holy Writ more impressive, or more creditable to the Jewish nation, than this assertion of God's sole honour by Israel, on the one hand, and manly vindication of the motives of the seven tribes on the other. Well would it be for the world, Mary, and for the cause of religion, were all questions relating to it discussed among "brethren" in the same uncompromising, yet conciliatory spirit! Did you remark, in proof of both, that the Israelites even offer, if the exiled tribes thought themselves cut off, by their position, from spiritual privileges, to give them up part of their own possessions in the promised land, rather than that, by a rival altar, God should be robbed of his glory?

MARY. I did not observe it, but I am sorry I was so hasty against the poor Reubenites and Gadites; for really so far from being wrong, they were quite right to make a "pattern" altar to keep their children in mind of God.

MAMA. Yes, and to put it out of the power of future generations to style their progeny "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, without hope and without God in the world."

What effect had the manly and convincing explanation of the accused tribes on their countrymen?

MARY. They told them, that, by "not committing this trespass against the Lord, they had delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord." How could this be, Mama?

MAMA. By averting those temporal judgments, which would not, under that dispensation, have failed to follow the apostasy of even a portion of God's chosen people. But for what uncommitted "trespass" on their own parts did these wise and good men specially bless God?

MARY. "That they had not gone up in battle to destroy the land wherein the children of Reuben and of Gad dwelt."

MAMA. Let this be a lesson to you, Mary, against rash judgments, to which you, even in the same matter, shewed yourself a little prone. There are few instances of apparent wrong, (between man and man especially), which dispassionate investigation will not either soften or remove: and even in supposed offences against God, it becomes those who see not the heart, to refer

“judgment” at least, if not disapprobation, to Him to whom its inmost recesses are known.

By what significant name was the Altar of Memorial called, by its pious founders?

MARY. “They called the altar *Ed*.”

MAMA. That is a “*witness*,” and the testimony they designed it to bear, was not to the existence of God, (as the translation might lead us to suppose), but to his being the God of themselves and their expatriated children. Would, Mary, that every exile among ourselves, from his country and its altars, were careful to set up in his heart and life such a living memorial of the faith of his native land, as heathens might admire, and not even an infidel could question or gainsay !

MORNING SEVENTH.

LESSON.—Joshua, Chapters xxiii and xxiv.

MAMA. We have in these chapters a fresh and affecting instance of the uniform solicitude of all the true servants of God, whom Scripture exhibits to us in situations of eminent trust and authority, to bequeath, ere they go hence and are no more seen, to their people and families, the invaluable legacy of a recital of God's past mercies, and a recapitulation of His promises and His commands. And surely if there is a time when such praiseworthy endeavours are likely to be blessed with success, it is when those who have, throughout long lives of piety and usefulness, displayed an example of the conduct they inculcate, can triumphantly appeal to their surrounding descendants for the truth of the testimony they deliver ; while it is to hearts softened by the approaching "death of the righteous," that the appeal is affectionately addressed !

But whose immediate example was in this, as

in many other parts of his public life, expressly followed by Joshua ?

MARY. That of Moses, Mama. You know we read in Deuteronomy, his beautiful dying speech to the children of Israel ; and I don't think they were ever quite so bad since they heard it.

MAMA. I agree with you that we scarcely hear of such flagrant offences as making the "golden calf," or the revolt of Korah and his companions, during the administration of Joshua. But then the period, remember, had not been (like that in the wilderness,) one of trial and vicissitude, but of nearly continual success, and Divine encouragement. It was absence of temptation to murmur and disobey, which, I fear, had more weight with Israel than the dying injunctions of Moses, though these *could* not yet have been forgotten. At what period were they renewed by Joshua ?

MARY. "A long time after the Lord had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies." How long, Mama ?

MAMA. It is supposed about seventeen years ; during which, Joshua, their faithful leader, by building a city on his own allotment, had provided for the security of his immediate descendants. What is then said of the bodily condition of this upright servant of the Lord ?

MARY. That "he waxed old and stricken in

age." How old, Mama? Did he live to be as old as Moses and Aaron?

MAMA. As he was a man of known weight and judgment when sent into Canaan with the other spies, and as we know that, for *their* fault, he was doomed to wander forty years in the wilderness, (though with the favour and promises of God to cheer him during their continuance) he was probably eighty at least on entering Canaan, about twenty years from which had now elapsed; so that less than one hundred cannot well be assigned as the "ripe age" at which (like a shock of corn in his season) the valiant type of a greater conqueror was peacefully gathered to his fathers.

MARY. Mama! what became of Caleb? You know he and Joshua were the only two who were to enter Canaan.

MAMA. I am glad you thought of asking; as the history of his comfortable settlement in it—that sure word of God, not "one jot or tittle" of which can ever fail—occurred in a chapter, which, on that very account, I intended to have made you read. Not only did that good soldier of the Lord of hosts safely reach the land of promise, but strong (as he himself says) at the age of eighty-five, as when Moses first sent him forth to "search" it—he boldly claims, on the authority of his promise in the name of God—the very moun-

tain on which his feet had trodden when (unlike their false and timid brethren) he and Joshua "wholly followed the Lord."

MARY. What mountain, Mama?

MAMA. That of Hebron, long after sacred to the Lord, and, before the conquest of Jerusalem, the residence of His servant David. The request proves the yet undaunted character of the aged warrior; for Hebron, at the time it was made, was the stronghold of those very "Anakims" (or Giants) before whom the other spies basely trembled, but whom Caleb, strong in *faith* as well as courage, says, "if the Lord be with him, he shall surely be able to drive out."

MARY. I am glad the old man was so bold, and so well rewarded; it is pleasant, Mama, to see the Bible promises come so often true!

MAMA. "Often," Mary! say *always*, and your remark will indeed be just. And this is one great advantage of an unbroken study of Scripture—that those who follow its regular thread, are made aware of a thousand coincidences between promise and fulfilment, which the desultory reader has neither time nor opportunity to trace. You will not *now*, I think, be tempted to repent that we read a "little more about the children of Israel!"

Let us see what new particulars in their marvellous history we can glean from the parting ad-

dress of Joshua; but not without first noticing his admirable exhortations. To what do they chiefly relate?

MARY, Oh, the same things as Moses'—"keeping all that was written in the book of the law," and "cleaving to the Lord," and "not serving or bowing down to the gods of the nations that remained among them."

MAMA. And were these *easy*, as well as imperative precepts, afterwards fulfilled by his hearers?

MARY. Oh! no; they broke them all very often, as soon as Joshua was gone.

MAMA. And what did the "spirit of prophecy" enable him in that case to assure them of?

MARY. "Know for a certainty, that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of the nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land, which the Lord your God hath given you."

MAMA. That their heathen neighbours proved the *former*, may be read in the shameless and endless idolatries adopted from them by Israel. And how thoroughly, in punishment of these, they became the *latter*, we shall soon have the whole book of Judges to inform us. That these evils

should not overtake them unwarned, or unstimulated to a better course, was the object of Joshua, in his grateful recapitulation of God's goodness to their nation, from its very origin in the person of their father Abraham. Like them, *he* had been taken "from the other side the flood," and led by God, a "stranger and a sojourner," through that very Canaan where, by the same hand, his ungrateful progeny were now firmly established. Did *their* faith and devotion to God, under such greatly superior advantages, for a moment equal or even emulate his?

MARY. Oh! no. Abraham believed God when things seemed most unlikely, and his children never did, even when his miracles were before their eyes.

MAMA. A very good, and alas! just distinction between "living by faith" a pilgrim on earth, like Abraham, and having the "eyes blinded," and the heart hardened, by the very temporal gifts of God, like the carnal unthankful Israelites. Had there not been something peculiar in the *way* in which these were bestowed, which should have excited them doubly to gratitude? What says the 13th verse?

MARY. "I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not,

and ye dwell in them. Of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not, do ye eat."

MAMA. A rare, nay unique, instance of the depopulation of a whole country, for the express advantage and accommodation of those who had not (except in the promise of Jehovah) a title to so much as a "footbreadth" of this terrestrial paradise! But what is the inference drawn by Joshua from this unparalleled installation?

MARY. "Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth." And he bid them "choose that day between Him and the gods of Egypt, and those of the Amorites." A pretty comparison! if they had had sense to make it properly!

MAMA. But *who* at least shewed that in *his* mind the choice was made, and irrevocable?

MARY. Joshua, Mama; he never hesitated, but says, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." But the very people cried, "God forbid that we should forsake the Lord!" Did *they* really mean what they said?

MAMA. Yes, at the time, I suppose, overawed and shamed by the manly resolution of Joshua. But had the *prayer* (for such the expression literally is) ascended from *humble* as well as devoted hearts, it never could have been so soon not only unfulfilled, but belied. How does Joshua indeed

insinuate their unfitness in their own strength, for the great task they had so lightly undertaken.

MARY. "Ye cannot serve the Lord, for He is an holy God. He is a jealous God, He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins."

MAMA. It would be well if this humbling and salutary view of the justice and holiness of Him *we* serve, entered oftener into even the Christian's contemplation. God in Christ is neither less "jealous" nor less "holy" than of old, else the sacrifice of Calvary would not have shaken earth to its centre, more awfully far than the thunders of Sinai. And that we "cannot serve the Lord," except in a higher and purer nature than our own, is only become more sadly true, since men have seen exemplified in the character of Christ, that "perfect obedience" with which alone the Father is "well pleased." As Joshua, however, takes advantage of the very *presumption* of the Israelites, to bind them, by their voluntary declaration, to fidelity to God, it would be well if the vows *we* too have made at baptism were borne in mind as a talisman against their open and flagrant violation. While on the subject of confirmation of oaths, it is a singular coincidence, that the Oak of Shechem, where "all the people and Joshua set up a great stone for a memorial," was probably the very spot where the Lord first ap-

peared unto Abraham, and made with him the covenant, now ratified by his descendants. What else, confirmatory of the above supposition, is recorded as having been done in Shechem?

MARY. Oh! burying the bones of Joseph, which they had brought out of Egypt, in the "parcel of ground which Jacob had bought for an hundred pieces of silver."

MAMA. A transaction which stamped *his* belief that it should hereafter be the heritage of his children. Where do we read were the remains of good Joshua laid?

MARY. "In the border of his inheritance"—oh! Mama! we have his exact age here, "an hundred and ten years old."

MAMA. You see we rather underrated it. But what name, more precious far than earthly titles of honour, accompanied the leader of Israel to his peaceful grave?

MARY. "Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord."

MAMA. The noblest inscription, Mary, which can adorn, on this side of eternity, the good man's tomb; and the only one which will survive the ruin of empires, and the wreck of worlds. To what other eminent person might it, about the same time, have been applied?

MARY. Eleazar, the son of Aaron, I suppose.

MAMA. Yes ; for the same faithful and zealous discharge of his sacerdotal duties, as Joshua had manifested in more secular affairs. And how long did the memory of these worthies continue to hallow and influence the conduct of their successors ?

MARY. “ All the days of the elders that over-lived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord.”

MAMA. You see here the beneficial effects of a privilege not always sufficiently valued or improved, viz. that of personal intercourse with the “ excellent of the earth.” Not only did the contemporaries of Joshua remain faithful themselves, but they were enabled by their influence to keep others in the same right path. How diligently then should we improve, and how highly should we prize (in youth especially), all opportunities of “ sitting at the feet” of, or “ taking sweet counsel together” with, those who, in our more favoured day, are “ burning and shining lights”—shewing forth the *power* of the gospel in their devotion to God, and its beauty, in their love to their fellow creatures.

MORNING EIGHTH.

LESSON—Judges, Chapters i. and ii.

MARY. Mama ! you have told me that Moses and Joshua both put down the things that happened in their time, but I should like to know, before I read it, who wrote this book of Judges ?

MAMA. And I should like extremely to be able to tell you with certainty who its good and pious, and in some passages, highly eloquent, author was. It has been variously ascribed to Phineas (the son of Eleazar the priest)—to King Hezekiah—to Ezekiel the Prophet—and also to Ezra, the restorer after the captivity, of the laws and polity of Israel. But a far more likely and well warranted conclusion is, that it was drawn up by Samuel, whom the Chronicles expressly represent as an *historian* ; and who, living and judging Israel in times immediately subsequent to the events described in this book, must have been much better able to record them than a writer of later days, independently of his higher qualifications as

a prophet, under the immediate inspiration of God. There are minor circumstances, too, which fix its date long prior to the age of Hezekiah or Ezekiel, such as the "Jebusites dwelling," at the time it was written, "with the children of Benjamin,"—whence (as we have incidentally had occasion to notice) they were finally expelled in the reign of David. Be the writer who he may, he is evidently one not unworthy to record the dealings of God with his chosen people, or to succeed, as the chronicler of their humiliating rebellions, and wonderful deliverances, the meek Moses and invincible Joshua. Nor was, as we shall soon see from the book itself, the line of wise judges, or valiant champions, permitted to terminate with the death of the eminent men, whose "gathering to their fathers" marked the accomplishment of the promises of God, and the entrance of the people they had so long led into Canaan.

MARY. But Joshua does not seem to have had any one appointed to succeed him like Moses?

MAMA. No; the tribes seem to have been purposely left to their natural leaders, to prove which of them would act in the spirit of the commands of God, by at once dispossessing the Canaanites from their allotted portion.

Which tribes do we find, at the very beginning of the book, thus actively and laudably engaged?

MARY. Judah was the first to go, but then God himself said it should be so.

MAMA. Yes ; thus confirming the pre-eminence which, in all future times, the tribe of Judah seems to have enjoyed, and which, in this instance, was accompanied by a signal victory over their enemies. What tribe do we find associated in the perils and glory of this pious enterprize ?

MARY. Simeon, Mama. You know that tribe lived beside Judah, and had no portion of its own.

MAMA. Well remembered. These tribes were also more straitly united than others, by their descent from the same mother, their fathers being both sons of Leah. The leaven of "cruelty" (with which they were reproached by Jacob) seems yet to have adhered to the latter, in the severity exercised towards Adonibezek. But how was it justified by the then existing law of retaliation ?

MARY. Because he had done the same to "three score and ten kings," and, for this, he says himself, "God requited him." But what could have put it into his heart to treat any one so strangely ?

MAMA. By thus mutilating his unhappy prisoners, he utterly incapacitated them from bearing arms any more ; and this, no doubt, (as well as the just punishment of his pride) was the ob-

ject of the Israelites in his own case. He did not long, however, survive, but fell a victim to shame and remorse.

MARY. Mama! Here we have Jerusalem taken by the children of Judah! I thought you said it was not done till David's time.

MAMA. I am glad you observed this; but you might have seen (a little farther in our chapter) that it was Benjamites who failed to drive out those Jebusites who occupied *their* portion of the site of the holy city. Do you remember which part, we learned lately, that was?

MARY. Oh! yes; the spot where the temple stood afterwards. You told me, this fulfilled what Moses had prophesied, that the "Lord should dwell between the shoulders of Benjamin, and cover him all the day long."

MAMA. A wonderful coincidence, with which, like many others, I was unacquainted, till digging in the exhaustless mine of Scripture, my dear child, for your information. But Hebron is another town very famous in Jewish story, and was, till the final taking of Jerusalem, the chief city of the nation. By whom did we lately read it was fought against and taken?

MARY. Caleb, Mama; but then it was called Kirjath Arba, because of the giants who lived there; and he said he would give his daughter to

whoever took Kirjath-sepher, and his own nephew was the bold man, and won her.

MAMA. Are you aware of the peculiar nature and importance of the "blessing," which, as a reward for his bravery, his bride took upon her to request from her father?

MARY. Yes, you have often explained to me how precious "springs of water" were in the dry country of Judea.

MAMA. But what strange pilgrims, from a far distant land, do we next find claiming and enjoying an inheritance among Israel? How came the "children of Moses's father-in-law" to have left "keeping their father's flock in Horeb," for a secure and fertile dwelling in Judah?

MARY. I don't know.

MAMA. What! have you forgotten Moses saying to Hobab, "Come with us to the land to which we are journeying, and we will do thee good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel?" Do you think this Arab of the desert now repented having exchanged, at the persuasion of his brother-in-law, the uncertain lawless life of a Bedouin, for the safety and plenty of the promised land? No. And thus, be assured, will it be with those who resign the world's unlicensed freedom for the far more rich as well as "glorious liberty of the sons of God."

MARY. Mama ! I see Judah went on driving out the Canaanites from the mountain ; but it says they “ *could* not drive out those of the valley, because they had chariots of iron.” Surely God could enable them to do so in spite of any chariots !

MAMA. Your remark is quite just ; and shews you to be sensible that it was not power in Jehovah, but faith and courage in Judah to profit by it, that were wanting. The same shameful deficiency seems to have induced the Benjamites to dwell for centuries intermixed with the heathen Jebusites ; to the injury, as we shall soon see, of their general morals, and their constant exposure to examples of idolatry, which they were but too prone to follow.

MARY. The “ house of Joseph ” were wiser. They went up against Bethel, and the Lord was with them, and they took it. Mama ! a man of that place seems to have behaved something like Rahab, and to have been rewarded in the same way !

MAMA. Yes, with his life, and that of his family ; but, as he chose to settle among his heathen neighbours the Hittites, conversion to the true God was not, I fear, added to temporal safety. We shall soon see what evils, both temporal and spiritual, arose to the remaining tribes of Israel

from similar association, inexcusable in their case, whatever they might be in that of an ignorant Canaanite. Do you remember for what Bethel (the *city of God*, as the pious house of Joseph now named it) became in after times sadly remarkable?

MARY. Was it not there that Jeroboam set up his golden calves, which “made Israel to sin?”

MAMA. Yes; when the half tribe of Ephraim, the unworthy descendants of pious Joseph, having shared the revolt of the ten tribes, partook also in the idolatry which was its cause and punishment.

But, Mary, in what solemn and authoritative manner do we find the timidity and disobedience of the greater part of the tribes reprov'd in the second of this day's chapters? Who is said to “come up” for the purpose from Gilgal to Bochim (or Shiloh) and here rebuke the assembled tribes?

MARY. “An angel of the Lord.”

MAMA. And would a simple heavenly messenger have thus taken upon him?

MARY. Oh! no; it must have been the same who spoke from the burning bush, for he says, “*I made you to go up out of Egypt,*” and “*I have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said I will never break my covenant with you;*” and I suppose the people knew, too, that it was God who reproached them, for they “*lifted up their voice and wept.*”

MAMA. Probably so; and such was the violence of their grief, that the place derived from it the name of "Bochim," or "weepers." But though they seemed to renew, by an immediate sacrifice, their broken covenant with God, we do not find that the "obedience" (which He hath said is "better than sacrifice,") attested the sincerity of their repentance; and *therefore* do we find that no sooner were the "elders who outlived Joshua," and whose example, no doubt, had some weight in restraining the spread of idolatry, gathered to their fathers, than "the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim."

MARY. Mama! does "Baalim," here, mean the Baalzebub we found mentioned in other parts of the Bible?

MAMA. Alas! my dear Mary, "Baalim" is a plural term, and means (as the Scriptures elsewhere express it) "Lords many and Gods many." It is applied to all the various idols of the Canaanite nations, but especially to their chief divinities, the sun and moon, the latter of whom, Ashtaroth, under the blasphemous name of the "Queen of Heaven," we said lately was a favourite object of worship with the idolatrous daughters of Israel.

But we must hasten to draw from the *third* of those chapters, (which a desire to keep unbroken

the history of Deborah and Barak obliged me to include in this day's reading,) the particulars of those chastisements which were in the *second* held out as the natural consequence of idolatry; and the temporal deliverances which the God, who in the "midst of judgment, remembereth mercy," occasionally afforded them.

Which of the nations with whom God, in anger, now suffered Israel to remain intermingled and surrounded, first vindicated his threatenings, and requited their sinful alliances and intermarriages with them, by tyranny and oppression?

MARY. "God sold them into the hand of the king of Mesopotamia." That was where Abraham came from, was it not?

MAMA. Yes; and a just requital of the Israelites' forgetfulness of the signal mercy by which their ancestor had been called from thence, and from idolatry, through faith in those very promises his descendants were now undervaluing and abusing. How long were they "sold to," or tributaries to this distant monarch?

MARY. Eight years; and it was brave Othniel, the husband of Caleb's daughter, who delivered them.

MAMA. Yes; when strengthened and inspired for the patriotic enterprize, by the "Spirit of the Lord." How long did the rest thus purchased for the land, endure?

MARY. Forty years; I suppose till Othniel died.

MAMA. Yes, with the first of the judges "raised up" by God, and the only one of whom some great human weakness, or even gross transgression, is not (for man's abasement and God's exaltation) recorded—seem to have expired alike the short-lived amendment, and consequent "rest," of the people he ruled over.

Whom did God next make his instrument for chastising them?

MARY. He "strengthened Eglon, King of Moab, against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord;" and they served him eighteen years, instead of eight.

MAMA. I see by your countenance that you are perplexed by something in the vengeance—a bloody one—executed on him by Ehud.

MARY. Oh! Mama, you always know what I am thinking! but I wish Ehud had not pretended to carry a *present* when he went to kill the king of Moab, or said he had a message to him from God.

MAMA. It is quite natural and proper for a young mind to revolt from apparent treachery, even when inspired by the most laudable motives. But you will be relieved to find that the "present" which distresses you, was only the customary and iniquitous "tribute" imposed by Eglon on the Israelites, of which Ehud, as bearer, gained

admittance to the heathen tyrant; and that the "message from God" (which in *one* sense indeed, and that a terrible one, Ehud *was* commissioned to deliver) is presumed by learned men to have been met by the king with apparent reverence, not as the decree of the God of Israel (whom he neither knew nor acknowledged), but as the result of some heathen oracle of divination.

But be this as it may, remember once for all, that the cruel and even sinful actions of men, overruled by God for the accomplishment of His purposes of wrath, to which (as we formerly remarked) amiable or peaceful characters, would be wholly unsuited, are nowhere in Scripture held out either for our praise or imitation. This remark, applicable to all the Old Testament, we shall have to bear in mind especially, throughout the whole book of Judges. But instead of "wresting," as scoffers have done, such instances "to their own destruction," and the disparagement of God's glory, let us bow in deeper admiration of the counsels of *Him* who, as we observed on entering on our present course of instructive reading—maketh the "wrath of men to praise Him," and still bends to his sovereign purposes, the "unruly wills and affections," as well of the enemies who resist, as of the instruments who promote them.

MORNING NINTH.

LESSON.—Judges, Chapters iv. and v.

MAMA. I have remarked with pleasure, my dear Mary, from the spirit and emphasis with which you have read these two chapters—the lively interest which has been awakened in your breast—by the noble display they afford of female heroism and eloquence. They must be cold and callous indeed—dead alike to piety and patriotism—by whom the exploits of Deborah, that woman “valiant for the truth,” or the yet more admirable hymn in which the glory of them is ascribed to the God of Israel—can be perused without kindred emotions ! But how came the Israelites once more into slavery—to whom God had so lately given deliverance by the dagger of Ehud, and by that yet more apparently inadequate instrument, the ox-goad of Shamgar ? which, however, I ought to mention, is still in Palestine a formidable weapon, eight feet long, and of which (in allusion to the

very slaughter made by Shamgar) a modern traveller thus speaks: "I am confident, that whoever should see one of them, as commonly used in all these parts, would pronounce it a weapon not less fit, perhaps fitter, than a sword, for such an execution." Deliverance having, by these simple means, been wrought twice for Israel, how came the nation to fall once more under the yoke of slavery?

MARY. Oh! for the old reason, "they did evil again in the sight of the Lord, when Ehud was dead?"

MAMA. This last phrase, which implies that for fourscore years his influence had been successfully exerted to keep them faithful to God, may serve to correct the uncharitable judgment which, from his being the minister of Divine vengeance on Eglon, you were inclined to pass on him yesterday. None but a pious and able man could have restrained so long the idolatrous propensities of his countrymen. Into whose power were they now delivered?

MARY. Jabin, king of Canaan, who reigned at Hazor. This was their own fault, Mama! for you know if they had done as God commanded, there would long ago have been *no* kings of Canaan at all.

MAMA. True, Mary; sloth and negligence, distrust of God, and false confidence in them-

selves, were with them as with us, the fruitful source of sorrow and discomfiture.

MARY. Ah ! and I see why they had not put down Jabin, when they might have done so. I suppose, because of his nine hundred chariots, which you know they were terribly afraid of.

MAMA. Very likely ; and the oppression they endured seems to have been proportioned to such base timidity. How long did it continue ?

MARY. " Twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel." Surely they might have " cried to God" sooner, and he would have helped them long before that time !

MAMA. Don't be too sure, Mary. The penitence of nations, as well as of individuals, is often tried by delay in the Divine mercy ; nor is it the uniform effect of calamity, public or private, to bring transgressors immediately to the throne of grace. Some it disheartens, others it even utterly hardens, and it is seldom, till human means have been exhausted, and found powerless, that *any* betake themselves in sincerity, to the offended majesty of Heaven. But by what feeble and unusual instrument did God, in His own good time, redress the wrongs of his people ?

MARY. A woman, Mama ! I know there were prophetesses, but I never heard of a female *judge* before.

MAMA. They are (as we remarked of the former class) thus sparingly exhibited in Scripture, that women may never be tempted by ambition to forego their more legitimate ornament of a "meek and quiet spirit;" while the few instances recorded are sufficient to keep up in all, a due respect for the sex which (on rare and special occasions) God himself has thus "delighted to honour." From what primitive throne did this female "seer" administer "judgment" to the children of Israel?

MARY. She "dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel."

MAMA. Both places famous for sanctity, and the former afterwards the residence of a greater than Deborah—even the famous prophet and judge of Israel—Samuel. By what message, wholly beyond the province of an uninspired female, did Deborah prove her claim to the title of a prophetess, and awake the slumbering courage of Barak?

MARY. She said God had commanded him "to draw toward Mount Tabor, with ten thousand men of Zabulon and Naphtali;" and that God would deliver Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, into his hand.

MAMA. You are, I daresay, unaware of the circumstances which, according to modern travellers, rendered Tabor a peculiarly eligible ren-

devious for troops in a hostile country. It not only stood on the confines of many different tribes, but while it was inaccessible to the chariots and horses of the enemy, it had on its summit, a plain (still said to exhibit remains of ancient fortifications), on which the little army of Barak could be conveniently disciplined. But did these natural advantages satisfy *him* of the practicability of the enterprize?

MARY. No; he said he would not go, unless Deborah went too. Surely it was cowardly in a man to refuse to stir without a woman!

MAMA. Remember that the "woman" was a prophetess, and as such calculated to animate the valour, and secure the obedience, of his soldiers. But though the request was complied with, her answer intimated that his want of faith and courage would be appropriately punished. How was this?

MARY. "The journey was not to be for his honour," and God was to "sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Mama! I am afraid to be rash, after what you said yesterday, but I don't think it could be for *her* honour either. Surely it was shocking in a woman to drive a nail through a man's head that was sleeping in her tent!

MAMA. Far be it from me, Mary, ever to blame the natural recoil of youth and innocence from

deeds of treachery and blood ! But to judge fairly of such, at the distance of centuries, and with the mild light of Christianity to make them shew doubly dark and repulsive in our eyes, we must not forget the rules laid down by the same blessed Gospel, for estimating the conduct and motives of others. We must transport ourselves to the rude lawless age, and wild savage deserts, in which Jael lived ; we must view her as a member of a trampled and oppressed race of slaves, into whose hand God had placed, as by miracle, the power of terminating by a blow that intolerable slavery, ere we can appreciate the force of the temptation, or rather impulse, to which (at the risk of her own life had the sleeping warrior been roused by the attempt) this heroic daughter of the desert sacrificed the natural horror of her sex for blood. Nay, we should remember, that, as an *Arab* woman (which being descended from Hobab the Kenites all were) she infringed, to deliver her Jewish adopted country, maxims dearer to this day, to her race, than even the feelings of sex, or the relentings of humanity. Within the sacred shelter of his tent, no Bedouin would even now (especially after offering him the refreshment of milk) take the life of the murderer of his only son. It must therefore have been a higher and purer motive far than human revenge,

which nerved the arm, and steeled the soul, of Jael to become the executioner of one doomed by Jehovah. Let the effect of the whole striking history upon ourselves, instead of harsh condemnation of an act, which change of times and happier circumstances forbid us adequately to appreciate, be thankfulness to God for that milder dispensation of His providence, and purer revelation of His will, which renders it impossible that women can ever be called on to cherish even the thought of vengeance, far less to pollute themselves with deeds of blood !

But your natural remark has led us to anticipate,—How came Sisera, a fugitive, into the power of Jael ?

MARY. Oh, Mama ! it was sure to happen, you know, because God said it. All his nine hundred chariots could do him no good, for he “ fled away on his feet,” and his hosts were discomfited with the edge of the sword before Barak, “ and there was not a man left.”

MAMA. A victory both in magnitude and completeness worthy of Him by whose Spirit it had been predicted, and by whose mighty arm it was achieved ! Nor is the noble ode of triumph which follows unworthy of the glorious theme. But before we re-echo its notes of praise, let us enhance for a moment the triumphant strain, by a view of

the far different anticipations with which the return of the slain commander was already, in imagination, hailed by his mother and her attendants.

MARY. Mama ! I can't help being sorry for the mother of Sisera.

MAMA. In so saying, you only add your unsophisticated homage to the truth and nature which have been universally felt to pervade these effusions of maternal pride and tenderness. Long, long indeed, would the mother of Sisera continue to look through the lattice in vain for his triumphant return ; nor is it known whether she ever enjoyed the poor gratification of recovering his inanimate remains. Be this as it may, the passage must ever exhibit an additional proof, that " He who knew what was in man," dictated even the interesting episodes which adorn the history of the Bible.

But we must go back a little, and analyze the " song of praise" of Deborah. What does it begin by commemorating ?

MARY. The " avenging of Israel."

MAMA. Yes, thereby ascribing unreservedly all the glory to Him to whom it was due, and calling in a sublime strain all the kings and princes of the trembling earth to bear witness to His supremacy. But after exhausting the loftiest terms to express the alarm and submission with

which God's mighty works in behalf of Israel had once inspired the neighbouring nations, in what humiliating contrast is the situation of the former placed, when, by "corrupting their way," they had provoked the Lord to forsake them?

MARY. It says, that "in the days of Shamgar the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through by-ways; and the inhabitants of the villages ceased." Was this because of robbers, or for fear of the king of Hazor's people?

MAMA. Both probably, for the same "corruption" which exposed them to the latter grievance would surely entail the former curse also. The root of the whole evil occurs in the next verse—what was it?

MARY. "They chose new gods," and "*then*," it adds, "was war in the gates."

MAMA. And by what defenceless state of the once chosen nation, is Shamgar's choice of an *ox-goad* to fight with, at once explained?

MARY. "There was not a shield or a spear among forty thousand in Israel!"

MAMA. Even so, one of the first acts of their conquerors seeming to have always been (as we shall see more fully exemplified in the case of the Philistines) disarming their unhappy vassals: Does not this scarcity of arms make the victor

just achieved by the Israelites both more wonderful in itself, and more decidedly of God ?

MARY. Oh ! yes. But is not Deborah a little too proud ? She says all this happened till "*she* arose, a mother in Israel." Surely it was God who raised her up, and not she herself.

MAMA. A truth, Mary, which none can suspect so pious a woman, even in the exultation of her heart, of ever forgetting. So far from arrogating to herself any merit in the recent deliverance, she not only says, "The Lord made me have dominion over the mighty," but expressly calls on the governors and great men among her people, to "rehearse" with her "the mighty acts of the Lord ;" by which those who could formerly not even draw water unmolested by the "noise of archers," might now, as "His people, go down free to their gates !" Did you observe how these men, who "sit in judgment," are here addressed by Deborah ?

MARY. "Ye that ride on white asses." You have often told me, when speaking of our Lord's entry into Jerusalem, that, so far from being a mean way of travelling, it was used by all the great people among the Jews.

MAMA. Yes, partly from the absence of horses, to "multiply" which, we have lately seen, was prohibited, and partly from the immense supe-

riority of the ass of those countries over the despised and degraded animal of our own.

But after distributing praise to such of the tribes as (like Zebulon) "jeoparded their lives unto the death," and reproaches to others, who (like Dan) "remained" unconcerned in their ships, what extraordinary and supernatural allies does this inspired woman represent as joining with Israel in the battle of the Lord?

MARY. She says, "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera;" and the "river, the ancient river Kishon, swept them away."

MAMA. By this noble figure of speech, she is thought to denote such thunders, lightning, and rain, as have often (as if sent from heaven) added to the discomfiture of routed armies; and by which the rapid torrent of the Kishon was swelled, till, with devastating fury, it swept the remnant of the host of Sisera before it.

And now, with the emphatic curse on "Meroz," for its backwardness in the service of the Lord (which the learned consider to be fulfilled by the very memory of its name and site having perished from the earth), we must conclude our review of the Song of Deborah—the poetry and sublimity of which even infidels have acknowledged; while Christians may draw from it an example of praise, for still nobler victory and more enduring deliverance.

MORNING TENTH.

LESSON—Judges, Chapters vi, vii, and viii.

MAMA. These three chapters, which, as comprising the history of the same eminent individual, it would have been improper to separate, place before us a fresh series of transgressions, and consequent miseries on the side of the Israelites, and of pardon and relief on the part of Him who “delighteth in mercy.” No sooner indeed, throughout the whole book, do we see the champions successively raised up by God, gathered to their fathers, or does a generation arise by whom their exploits are forgotten, than idolatry, disobedience, and rebellion, “come in” again “like a flood,” bringing with them oppression and tyranny, as their just and predicted punishment. How long had the “land rest” after the victory over Sisera?

MARY. Forty years; I suppose till the death of Deborah.

MAMA. And from what quarter, not altogether

an alien one, did the chastisement of the "evil doings" of the children of Israel this time come?

MARY. "The Lord delivered them for seven years into the hand of Midian," and "the children of the East" came up against them.

MAMA. Can you tell me by what ties of blood *both* should have been restrained from persecuting Israel?

MARY. I don't know any. Who were the Midianites?

MAMA. Descendants of Abraham, by his second wife Keturah; who, though like the sons of Ishmael (here called "Children of the East") not partakers in the spiritual blessings confined to the progeny of Isaac, had received from their wealthy parent an inheritance ample enough to have induced them to cultivate friendly feelings towards the elder branch of their common family. Yet so far was this from being the case, that their cruelty seems to have driven the children of Israel to a pitch of distress not before mentioned; what was it?

MARY. They were obliged to make caves and dens in the rocks to hide in; and the Midianites destroyed all the corn they had sown, and "left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass."

MAMA. Did you observe by what means this

dreadful desolation was accomplished? Did they march armies alone into the ravaged land of Israel?

MARY. No; "they came up as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it."

MAMA. If you had comprised in one sentence all the accounts given us by travellers, from that day to the present, of the wandering habits and predatory incursions of the Arabs, you could not have drawn a truer picture of a race who still swarm periodically out of their deserts into the neighbouring countries; settling down with their rude tents and countless flocks of camels and horses, till every green thing vanishes as effectually before them as before the flights of *locusts* (not grasshoppers, as we translate it), to whom they are here compared.

What was the effect on Israel of this fearful visitation?

MARY. They "cried unto the Lord," and the Lord sent them a prophet.

MAMA. And did he immediately, as in former cases, promise them deliverance?

MARY. No, no; he only seems to have reminded them, in God's name, how far they had disobeyed Him. But an angel came to Gideon,

who, I suppose, was better than his wicked neighbours, and served the true God.

MAMA. An angel, Mary! Have we not positive reason to conclude the celestial visitant to be a higher person far?

MARY. Let me see—oh! yes, I did not observe. He says to Gideon, “Have not *I* sent thee?”

MAMA. Even Gideon, ignorant as he was, seems to have understood this, for he calls him at once “My Lord;” and the Jews universally acknowledge it, from the name Jehovah (which we translate Lord) being in the narrative ascribed to the speaker. What was Gideon’s humble occupation when thus admitted to the presence of God?

MARY. “Thrashing wheat,” Mama, to hide it from the Midianites.

MAMA. Yes, beating it (which the word here signifies) in a private corner, *with a stick*, not daring to tread it out boldly as usual with oxen, for fear of the robbers by whom he was surrounded. By what lofty title was this timid young husbandman unexpectedly accosted?

MARY. “The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour!” How surprised he must have been to hear himself called so!

MAMA. Yes, Mary, and sinful as was no doubt the distrust of God implied in his first answer,

the personal humility which accompanied must in some degree have atoned it. How does he disclaim that epithet of "mighty," which sounded in his ears like a meckery?

MARY. "O my Lord, wherewithal shall I save Israel? Behold my family is poor in Manasseh; and I am the least in my father's house." Mama! Moses was just the same, till God said "*He would be with him.*"

MAMA. And the same gracious promise ought to have satisfied Gideon. Human nature, however, was weak in both, and both "required a sign of the Lord." But how did Gideon first prove his piety, and consequent claim to so great a favour?

MARY. He besought the angel to stay till he went for a "present," and he brought one of "flesh, and broth, and cakes." Surely, Mama, if he knew it was "the Lord," bringing him *food* was useless!

MAMA. It was precisely his "knowing it to be the Lord," that made the "*meat offering*" (here erroneously translated "present") peculiarly appropriate, and as such acceptable. It was a *religious sacrifice*, by which, in the overflowing of a grateful heart, Gideon sought to entitle himself to the continued favour of his God. How was its acceptance manifested?

MARY. Fire came out of the rock when the

angel touched it with his staff, and consumed the sacrifice, and then Gideon first knew *for certain* that he had seen the Lord face to face, and was afraid. But the Lord said, "Peace be unto thee, fear not, thou shalt not die."

MAMA. Observe the pious spirit in which Gideon immediately commemorated this gracious assurance, by building an altar, and calling it "Jehovah-shalon," or "the Lord send Peace." But what vindication of God's awful majesty must take place, ere even the good intentions of a pious heart could find acceptance?

MARY. Gideon was first to throw down his father's altar to Baal, and the grove that was beside it. How strange that an idolatrous father should have so good a son! I wonder if *he* had once worshipped Baal too?

MAMA. Very possibly; but, if so, "the days of that ignorance God winked at," in consideration of the holy zeal and boldness with which he now set about his perilous task. What time was he obliged to choose for the work of destruction, among a people, alas! "wholly given to idolatry?"

MARY. The night, Mama; and when morning came, and they saw Baal's altar down, and another built in its place, they told Gideon's father to bring out his son that he might die.

MAMA. And how was this demand of a whole enraged people met by one of the humblest among them? Did he entreat them to spare his son, or make any apology for him?

MARY. No, he behaved with more sense and spirit; telling them, that, if Baal was a God, he could very well plead for himself, and punish the man who threw down his altar.

MAMA. Does this remind you of another ironical speech to the same effect, made on a similar occasion, not by a converted idolater, but by a faithful servant of God?

MARY. Oh! yes; Elijah mocked the priests of Baal in the same way, and said, he must be "sleeping" or "gone on a journey," when he did not answer their prayers. It was very bold in both, Mama, but especially in Joash, and I wonder the people minded him.

MAMA. Truth will often prevail, Mary, even with an incensed multitude, and the consciences of some at least among them must have been "on the Lord's side."

But what still more formidable enemies did Gideon's bold attack on idolatry provoke?

MARY. All the Midianites, and Amalekites, and children of the east, were gathered together in Jezreel. But Gideon was not afraid; for the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he blew a

trumpet, and sent messengers and gathered an army too.

MAMA. So far his conduct was courageous as well as prudent. But did he, without farther misgivings, confide in the promise of the Lord, "Surely *I* will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man?"

MARY. No ; he still wanted the "sign" he had asked for before, to make sure that God would indeed save Israel. How foolish not to believe him at once !

MAMA. It is a folly, Mary, which thousands to this day share with the far less culpable husbandman of Manasseh, the least in an obscure family of an insignificant tribe in Israel. You are ready to blame Gideon for not at once recognizing in himself the future deliverer of Israel, and conqueror of Midian ; what shall we say of those for whom deliverance and conquests *have* actually been achieved, and who yet hesitate to appropriate to themselves the benefits of the victory ? Are not their doubts more sinful far, and more insulting to God, than the test proposed by the simple shepherd of Manasseh ?

MARY. None but a shepherd lad would surely have thought of such a miracle. It seems very childish.

MAMA. When talking once of miracles, did we

say it was their magnitude and importance only which proved them to be such ?

MARY. No ; for you told me the swimming of an iron axe-head on the waters of Jordan was as much a miracle as feeding five thousand men with a few loaves and fishes.

MAMA. True ; and why ? do you remember ?

MARY. Because none but God could change or interfere with the laws of nature, and it was not *natural* for iron to swim.

MAMA. I am glad you have understood as well as recollected the test by which the genuineness of all miracles, whether great or small (as you would call them) must be tried. Was it *natural*, then, for dew to fall on all around, while the fleece of Gideon remained dry, or again to fall on *it* alone ?

MARY. Oh ! no ; I see that few miracles could be more difficult, though I thought little of it at first.

MAMA. If you had thought a little more deeply *now*, you would have seen that the word “difficult” is altogether out of place, in speaking of that which can only be performed by Omnipotence. To Him who made the world, all interruptions of its order are *alike* possible and easy. But, for finite minds like ours, it is indeed “difficult” to get rid of a different impression ! Did the “sign” required satisfy Gideon ?

MARY. Yes ; when God had kindly done it for him a second time. But why, in the world, Mama, did God make him send away almost all his army, when the Midianites were so many and strong ?

MAMA. For the reason assigned by Himself, "lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me."

MARY. Ah ! I had overlooked that. But what a curious method was taken to find out which were to stay ! It seemed almost as trifling as the fleece of Gideon.

MAMA. On the contrary, it only proved, that He who, in the eloquent language of Job, is called the *Father* "of the drops of dew," is a "discerner also of the hearts of the children of men." Many have supposed that the various modes of drinking resorted to by the warriors of Gideon, shewed a greater or less degree of effeminacy and weakness, or of courage and resolution. But He who "knew what was in man" needed no such external indications ; and, when we consider the *nature* of the victory which, by means of the three hundred left, God was about to accomplish, *their* greater or less share of strength and courage was of very little consequence. Under what homely figure was this great discomfiture predicted in a dream to a man of Israel ?

MARY. It was as odd as all the rest. He dreamed

that a barley cake rolled into the camp of Midian, and threw down the tents.

MAMA. Yes; and God permitted Gideon to overhear the inspired application of the dream to himself, from which, with his usual piety, he drew materials for praise and encouragement. But, with what singular weapons did he arm his little band of chosen followers?

MARY. With "trumpets and pitchers, and lamps in them." How could he think of such things?

MAMA. If the object was to create surprise and confusion in the unsuspecting camp of the enemy, I don't know that better could have been chosen. The blowing, all at once, of three hundred trumpets, must have fearfully awakened the slumbering Midianites; while the loud crash of the earthen jars, and sudden glare of the torches concealed in them, must have conspired to terrify and bewilder them. What do we find to have been the result of this night attack?

MARY. Oh! they were bewildered enough, for some killed each other, and the rest fled; and all Israel gathered against them, and took them, and cut off the heads of two of their princes.

MAMA. This will teach you, I think, not to undervalue, in future, the trifling means by which the greatest designs of Providence are frequently

brought about. The same Being who invested the "trumpets" of Israel with power to level the proud walls of Jericho, could send home their blast with withering terror to the hearts of the cruel Midianites. But we must not forget the prevailing watchword with which the victory was led on and achieved; what was it?

MARY. "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon."

MAMA. Yes; that direct acknowledgment of the presence and power of Jehovah, by which conquest among the Israelites never failed to be ushered in.

We must hasten over the comparatively unimportant details of the subsequent triumphs of Gideon; only remarking that though, like others of the age, not unaccompanied with excessive severity and indulgence of personal revenge, they were, on the whole, in some measure palliated by acts of previous treachery on the part of their victims. Of the deaths of his brethren, he was, even by the law of Moses, the legal avenger; and "blood for blood" was the stern requisition of those iron times. Let us be thankful for living, when the most attached of relatives would shrink from imbruing his hands in that of even a brother's murderer! But while we lament the ferocity with which Gideon pursued his vengeance, let us do justice to his noble dis-

interestedness, and true devotion to God, in rejecting the proposal of permanent sovereignty over Israel, which (in defiance of His express prohibition against kings,) was made him by its short-sighted rulers. How was this noble denial worded?

MARY. "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you. The Lord shall rule over you." This was quite right. But, Mama! I think "ear-rings" were always to be put to a bad use in the Bible; for Gideon's ephod was almost as wrong as Aaron's calf.

MAMA. It was, Mary; and like all the sins and weaknesses of the less faulty characters of Scripture, it is impartially recorded for our example and warning. From other errors of Gideon, our next reading will shew that lamentable consequences to his family sprung. But, in the mean time, let us draw from his chequered history deep insight into the mysterious ways of Providence, and a humbling conviction of the inherent sinfulness that cleaves to the best of its human instruments. Who can view Gideon as represented by the unerring hand of inspiration,—at once courageous and desponding, pious and distrustful, disdaining power, and yet abusing it for purposes of vengeance, without recognising a faithful picture of human inconsistency? Who can behold him one

day "valiant for the truth" against a whole nation of idolaters ; the next, refusing to lead the armies of Jehovah without the superfluous encouragement of a "sign from heaven ;" in youth, overturning the cherished monuments of his paternal idol worship ; and, in age, "making an ephod" for a snare to himself and his polluted household, without exclaiming, in humble recognition of infirmities from which none among us are exempt, "Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him ; or the son of man that thou shouldst visit him ?"

MORNING ELEVENTH.

LESSON.—Judges, Chapters ix. and x.

MAMA. The somewhat hurried manner in which the length of yesterday's reading obliged us to dismiss the latter portion of the life of Gideon, makes it expedient to look back to what is said of his surviving family, and their treatment by their countrymen, amid the renewed corruption which quickly ensued upon his death. How many sons did Gideon, or Jerubbaal, as he is in this day's reading called, leave ?

MARY. Three score and ten ; what a number ! But it says he had many wives.

MAMA. Yes, Mary ; in those primitive times, a plurality of wives was tolerated, if not expressly permitted among the Jews. But, in innumerable instances, besides the present (such as the families of David, of Solomon, and other rulers of Israel, who were led, by their wealth and power, to multiply these sources of domestic discord) great individual sorrows, as well as family misfortunes.

were the consequence of a departure from the law of marriage, as wisely instituted by God Himself at the creation of the world. These were still farther aggravated, when, as in the case of Gideon himself, and even in that of Abraham the "friend of God," wives of inferior rank (chiefly female slaves) were added to the number; whose sons, like Ishmael, and Abimelech, and Absalom, having no lawful inheritance, or natural rank among their brethren, became turbulent and discontented; "their hand against every man, and every man's hand against them."

By what ingratitude on the part of the children of Israel was Abimelech's wicked designs against his brethren rendered easy of execution?

MARY. They "shewed no kindness to the house of Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had shewed unto Israel."

MAMA. Yes, Mary; even thus did the same volatile people, who "remembered not the Lord their God who delivered them on every side," neglect those very descendants of Gideon, whom they had clamoured to have for hereditary kings! But by what plausible arguments did Abimelech strive to stir up first his mother's family, and then all the men of Shechem, against the rest of his unhappy brethren?

MARY. "Whether is it better for you that all

the sons of Jerubbaal, three score and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you? Remember also that I am your bone and your flesh." I thought that Gideon had said that *none* of his sons should "rule over them."

MAMA. So did that, in many respects, wise and good man decide. But the ambition inseparable from persons born in an eminent station, probably led all his sons, more or less, to aspire at dominion. If not, the words of Abimelech would have had less fatal weight. From what treasury was he supplied with the means of getting up his rebellion?

MARY. They gave him money out of the "house of Baalberith." Was he the same as Baal?

MAMA. The latter, you know, (which signifies Lord,) was a general name for the Canaanitish deities. The one particularly meant here, is supposed to have been so called from resenting broken covenants; perhaps as the avenger of the insult to idol worship offered by the courageous Gideon. But what use (quite of a piece with the source from whence it flowed,) did Abimelech make of this ill-gotten treasure?

MARY. He "hired vain and light persons) which followed him."

MAMA. Yes, of such are generally composed the chief abettors of every insurrection against

lawful authority in church and state. From the recreant godless Levites, who mustered at the impious call of Korah, to "all who were in distress, or in debt, or discontented," who flocked to David (not as the chosen future king of Israel, but merely as an outlaw and fugitive from Saul), those two classes of supporters, the needy and irreligious, (as we are told "vain and light" should here be rendered), have ever abounded under the banners of revolt. The hateful character of the present tumult was soon proved by the massacre in which it terminated? What was the first act of Abimelech?

MARY. How shocking! He went to his own father's house, and slew his sixty brethren "all on one stone," all except Jotham, who hid himself. Mama! this was just like little Joash escaping from Athaliah.

MAMA. And two massacres of similar atrocity are happily unparalleled in Scripture. But learned men have supposed idolatry, as well as ambition, to have had its share in both; and that the "stone" on which Abimelech remorselessly sacrificed his brethren, was a fragment of the altar of Baal, overturned by his pious father. If this was indeed so, what memorial to the true God do we find to have been polluted by being the scene of the proclamation of Abimelech?

MARY. The pillar of Shechem. I forget about it.

MAMA. Don't you remember it was set up by Joshua (in the supposed place of God's first appearance to Abraham), as a perpetual memorial of the covenant between him and the children of Israel?

MARY. Yes, I remember now : it might have shamed these wicked murderers ! But, Mama, does there not seem something childish in Jotham telling the people silly fables about " trees speaking," instead of reminding them at once (as he did afterwards), of the good his father had done them, and the bad return they had made for it ?

MAMA. If we did not find that, to this day, such fictions are both acceptable and convincing to the people of the same countries, it might be esteemed " silly " to employ them. But the higher example of our Lord, who (though, as the author of all truth, he abstains from personification of inanimate objects), has perpetual recourse to imaginary circumstances to excite the attention of his hearers, has lent to the " parables " of the East a dignity and importance which must ever shield them from contempt. Even in this " silly fable," as you are tempted to call it, of Jotham, there is much ingenuity and force of rebuke ; while, by ushering it in with an appeal to the true God, he gave it a strong claim on the conscience, as well

as the understanding of his countrymen. What could more aptly illustrate the base and unworthy selection of the degenerate "son of a maid servant," to be their head and ruler, than the comparison of a rude and profitless bramble, exalted at the expense of the consecrated olive, and nutritious fig, and vine, "that maketh glad the heart of man?" Or what could more bitterly typify the ingratitude of the Israelites for the substantial benefits conferred on them by Gideon? So conscience-struck, indeed, do they seem to have been, that we read of no man that "answered him a word;" and that his parable was emphatic as well as ingenious, the mutual "fire" with which Abimelech and his wicked associates vexed and consumed each other, in due time testified.

How soon did the "evil spirit" between these confederates in wickedness break out?

MARY. "When Abimelech had reigned three years in Israel, the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with him."

MAMA. And in requital of what crime was this permitted?

MARY. Oh! the murder of his three score brethren.

MAMA. And was this to be avenged on Abimelech alone?

MARY. No, no; on the men of Shechem which "*aided him.*"

MAMA. Yes, and whose treachery, after ruining Abimelech, was to be finally turned against themselves. Oh ! Mary, how strong is that voice of God within the breast of even fallen creatures, which prompts the youngest to exult, when, even in this world, His justice is vindicated, and the wicked taken in their own net !” And if *we* thus feel (even while in this imperfect state), as if personally concerned in the punishment of transgressors like ourselves, can we for a moment listen to those who would represent the final punishment of *all* wickedness as not only unworthy of, but repugnant to, God ! So far from this, it will be one of the most awful features of the day of judgment, that the wicked themselves must acquiesce in the justice of their own condemnation.

It would be too tedious and unprofitable to follow Abimelech, and his late friends, through the sickening details of their mutual treachery. How did each try, in turn, to destroy the other ?

MARY. By “ lying in wait,” like cowardly deceitful creatures. But Abimelech got the better at first !

MAMA. And what cruel revenge, of a piece with his former conduct, did he take on the city and men of Shechem, his “ *bone and his flesh*,” as he lately called them ?

MARY. He slew all the people, and beat down

the city, and sowed it with salt." What was that for?

MAMA. As a mark of savage triumph, and of a wish, at least, to consign the spot (the birth-place, be it remembered, of his mother and her family) to hopeless desolation. In so doing, Abimelech perverted to the gratification of private revenge, a mark of reprobation ordered by God to be set on the site of idolatrous cities, and on the dwellings of parricidal rebellious sons, such as his own act had just proved himself to be. But what farther barbarities did he practise on the garrison of the citadel, or "tower" of Shechem?

MARY. Oh! he burnt them cruelly, and women among them too—about a thousand altogether.

MAMA. And where had these unfortunate people taken refuge?

MARY. "In an hold of the house of the God Berith." So he burnt the temple of the very false God he pretended to worship! What a wicked wretch!

MAMA. But see with what prompt and strict retribution vengeance was dealt out to him, by means of another imprisoned and desperate garrison, and by the hand of one of the sex he had so ruthlessly suffered to perish. What happened when he was in the act of placing once more his *savage bonfires* against the door?

MARY. "A woman cast a piece of a millstone upon his head, and almost broke his skull;" and that she might not say she had killed him, he got his armour-bearer to "thrust him through." It was too good a death for him!

MAMA. A sufficient proof, however, of that just vengeance of God for his unnatural cruelty, with which the chapter so properly closes; while the involvement in the same fate of his guilty abettors, shews that though for a time "hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished."

We must cast a hasty glance over the successive "defenders," whom God, in our next chapter, "raised up" for guilty Israel. Of Tola the first we hear nothing, nor of the enemies from whom he proved a deliverer. How long did his reign endure?

MARY. "He judged Israel twenty-three years, and died, and was buried in Shamir."

MAMA. How few are there, Mary, among either the judges or subsequent kings of Israel, of whom it would not have been well had as little been recorded as of this servant of God, known to us only by name! Of him alone, and his immediate successor Jair, are there no disgraceful weaknesses, or open transgressions, to beset against a few chequered testimonies of zeal for God, and devotion to his service! One negative merit must

at least have certainly been theirs'; for it was not till they were removed, that the children of Israel once more "did evil in the sight of the Lord," after forty-five years of apparent abstinence from idolatry—due, in all probability, to the influence of these two worthy men.

MARY. And now they *did* make up for it by worshipping, not Baal only, but all the false gods they could hear of round about!—"The gods of Syria, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines." Mama, they were too bad!

MAMA. Yes, for you and I, Mary; but not for Him who alone is entitled to judge of the extent of his own forbearance. But indeed even His "anger" was now "hot against Israel;" and whom did He make its appropriate instruments?

MARY. Oh! the very people whose gods they borrowed so meanly; the Philistines, and the children of Ammon.

MAMA. And how long did this merited chastisement continue?

MARY. "They vexed and oppressed the children of Israel eighteen years;" and when they cried at last to God, I am half glad he did not save them immediately; for I am sure it was for their good to be put off, and reminded of their perpetual rebellions. I can't be wrong *now*, Mama,

for even God said he would deliver them no more, and bade them go and cry to the gods they had chosen.

MAMA. Yes, my dear ; but let us take care lest what in the mouth of Jehovah was but legitimate reproof and correction, degenerates in our's into unchristian bitterness. Till we have been placed in the same circumstances of exposure to idolatry as the Israelites, we can never be entitled to pronounce their doom ; and in so doing (while sinners, as we all are, against clearer and more irresistible convictions), can we ever be sure we are not unwittingly, like David to Nathan, condemning ourselves. The Israelites, as a nation, forsook God every twenty or thirty years. Is there one year, or even day, of our lives, during which, as individuals, we can say we have faithfully and conscientiously "cleaved" to Him ? Ask yourself this before you are "glad" to see your fellow creatures repulsed from the footstool of their offended Judge ; and blush still more for the avowal of this vindictive feeling, when you read of the very opposite emotion ascribed here to your God, viz. that his "soul was grieved" for the misery of the children of Israel.

MARY. I am quite sorry, Mama, that I spoke so harshly ; but the Israelites are so provoking !

MAMA. Call to your aid, then, the "charity

which is not easily provoked," and remember who it is that hath said "Judge not, that ye be not judged." I should like to bring the case home a little to your own country and feelings. Suppose some thousand years hence, a historian should describe you and me (and justly) as belonging to a nation, distinguished beyond all others by God—favoured with innumerable advantages of soil, climate, and situation—protected from aggression—shielded from the miseries of war—blessed with the most equal government, and purest form of religion which have ever prevailed in any land. Could he go on to say that these unexampled blessings were in any measure deserved or requited by national holiness, gratitude, and devotion to God? that all, or any large portion of us, was a whit better, than if such favours had been withheld, and such signal advantages denied us? Alas! Mary, when the irreligion, ingratitude, and depravity of our country shall at length have cast it down from the proud pre-eminence which, as a people favoured by God, it had long maintained; how would you shudder to hear the expression of "rejoicing" over even this merited catastrophe from the lips of exulting foes!

We know not how soon Britain may, in her turn, be abandoned to her idols of wealth, and

power, and expediency. But, in the mean time, let us, while acknowledging with trembling consciousness, our utter incapacity of "doing justly," at least "love mercy, and walk humbly before our God."

MORNING TWELFTH.

LESSON—Judges, Chapters xi. and xii.

MAMA. Our last reading terminated with the expressions of unusually sincere penitence (accompanied with their only legitimate fruit, the suppression of idolatry) on the part of the children of Israel; and with that deeply affecting figure of human speech, by which the “soul” of Jehovah was said to “be grieved” for their “misery.” From the yoke of what warlike and long victorious nation was deliverance now about to be granted by Him, to the prayers and tears of his people?

MARY. The children of Ammon. You know they had vexed and oppressed them for eighteen years; and at the end of our last chapter, they were gathered together and encamped at Gilead. And the Israelites were assembled against them too; only they wanted a leader, and said, whoever would begin to fight should be “head” over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

MAMA. And by what countryman of their own was the tempting recompense earned ?

MARY. By Jephthah the Gileadite, who, it says, was "a mighty man of valour;" but his brothers thrust him out, because he was the "son of a strange woman."

MAMA. Yes, like Abimelech, of one of those inferior wives of whom we lately spoke; whose toleration, by the customs of the Jews, proved a fertile source of family discord and fraternal hatred. The term "strange woman" here, is moreover thought to imply that the mother of Jephthah was of a different nation, and on that account her son would be an object of double contempt and suspicion; though not necessarily excluded by the circumstance from a share in his father's inheritance. By whom do we find him also (like Abimelech) surrounded in his exile ?

MARY. "Vain men were gathered to him, and went out with him."

MAMA. Surely may we say, "God's ways are not as our ways," when the proscribed son of an alien mother, attended by a few lawless companions, is made the instrument of deliverance to a whole people; and, as a prelude to this, an object of abject supplications to the very countrymen by whom he had been spurned and expelled! Did Jephthah at first give implicit credence to their

assurances (extorted by distress) that he should be their "head?"

MARY. No, Mama, he could hardly believe in such an honour. But I think he must have deserved it, for he says at the very first, "If the Lord deliver the children of Israel before me;" and when they made the agreement, he "uttered all his words before the Lord."

MAMA. And do you not think this then unusual, and, under the circumstances, wonderful piety, in the "son of a strange woman," must have marked him out, far more than his being a "mighty man of valour," as a fit agent in the plans of providence for the deliverance of Israel? Had this piety been (as we shall soon find was not the case) under the guidance of equal discretion, the character of Jephthah would have come down to us unstained by its greatest blot. But, in the mean time, nothing can be more temperate or reasonable than his answer to the expostulations of the bitter enemies, whom, had his rashness been universal, he would have rushed on, without discussion on the goodness of their cause. We trace his piety also, in the motive he assigns for retaining the country alleged to have been taken from Ammon by his forefathers, on their way from Egypt, viz. that because "the *Lord God* had dispossessed the Ammonites from before Israel, there-

fore should they possess their land." For what reason had this dispossession been permitted, when the boundaries of Edom and Moab were religiously respected, by the express command of God?

MARY. Oh! you told me long since, and it is mentioned again here, that Israel never would have meddled with Lot or Esau's children in any way, if the ungrateful cross Ammonites had not refused their civil request to pass through their country, and chose to fight against them, and lost it. So they had no right to want it back again so long after. But surely Jephthah did not *think* Chemosh, the god of the Ammonites, really gave *them* any thing, as God gave the children of Israel?

MAMA. No, he only addressed them as heathens, jealous for the honour of their gods of wood and stone; and contrasted with these the superior inviolability of the gifts of Jehovah. This is proved, by his invoking, as sole judge of the whole controversy, the one true God. But on the idolatrous Ammonites the solemn appeal, as might be expected, had no effect. How was Jephthah now expressly consecrated to his high office?

MARY. The spirit of the Lord came upon him. Mama! if this was the case, why did it let him make the rash vow he was so soon to repent of?

MAMA. I am glad you have asked the ques-

tion, because nothing is more necessary in reading scripture history, than to discriminate between the inspired and uninspired actions of its eminent characters. If the Divine Spirit with which Jephthah was invested, as Captain of the Lord's host against his enemies, had enabled him to foresee the consequences of his vow, he would have been (which we nowhere read of) a prophet; and if it had entirely overruled or superseded his naturally enthusiastic disposition, he would have ceased to be a man. Is it not far more for our instruction, that, instead of such supernatural controul as would have converted into mere machines the human beings designed for our example and warning, they are left (except as regards their immediate commission) "men of like passions" with ourselves; capable, in short, like Jephthah, of carrying to excess even the most laudable emotions of which our nature is susceptible? But in what did the indiscretion of Jephthah's vow consist? Was it not both natural and praiseworthy to promise a thank-offering to the Lord, in case of victory achieved by His power?

MARY. Oh! yes, Mama; but it was *very* rash to say he would offer for a burnt-offering whatever came first out of the door of his house. Why it *could* only be his daughter or one of the family!

MAMA. True, if we limit the expression to

the actual "house," instead of rather extending it to those "gates," within which we find, in Scripture, *all* the possessions of a wealthy Jew comprised.

MARY. How shocked he must have been when he saw his only child come to meet him with timbrels and dances! Mama, I don't think, except the offering up of Isaac, (and he, you know, was not killed after all), there is any story in the Bible so melancholy as Jephthah sacrificing his daughter. And such a sweet dutiful resigned creature too! just like Isaac, and more so, for she had a long time to think of her sad fate. Surely God could never be pleased with any thing so unnatural!

MAMA. Certainly not; for of all the enormities of the heathen, human sacrifices, and especially "making their sons and daughters to pass through the fire," were denounced by Him with the utmost abhorrence. Now, as this latter "abomination unto the Lord" would have actually taken place, had the innocent daughter of Jephthah been made a literal "burnt-offering,"—let us try what ground there is for the nearly divided weight of opinion which would have us regard the sacrifice as only figurative; and involving no more than the perpetual seclusion from the world and mankind, of the devoted victim, like the nuns of modern times in catholic countries.

MARY. I should be quite glad to think this was all ; but why would her father have been so sorry ?

MAMA. Because, in addition to the loss of his only child's society, he thereby cut her off from all hope of being the mother of the promised "seed," a privilege so highly prized by the daughters of Israel. But we must not run away with this pleasing conclusion—against which the general belief of the Jews themselves is said to tend ; while it certainly has in its favour the utter unlawfulness of human sacrifices, and improbability of Jephthah's thus imagining to propitiate the true God ; as well as various expressions in the history itself, which seem inconsistent with the idea of actual immolation.

These, for your comfort, I will mention to you, as discovered and applied by learned men. First, then, in the original verse where Joshua says, that whatever came forth to meet him should be the Lord's, "*and*" he would offer it for a burnt-offering, —the margin of the Bible gives "*or*" as the true reading ; from which it has been inferred that an animal only was intended to be sacrificed, while a human being would be dedicated (like Samuel) to the Lord. Another more conclusive fact is, that it was her celibacy, and not death, which formed the subject of the victim and her compa-

nion's lamentations ; and the third and strongest of all, is found in the circumstance, that where it is said the " daughters of Israel went four days in every year to lament for " the daughter of Jephthah," to " talk with" or " carry presents to," is supposed to convey more truly the sense of the original Hebrew. Two things only are plain in this much controverted history. First, that God, who punished with death here, and has threatened with " Tophet" (or hell-fire) hereafter, all parents capable of embruing their hands in the blood of their children, could neither have accepted in this case the sacrifice or " person" of Jephthah ; even had the authority of the latter, as " head over Gilead," enabled him to take the life of his innocent child, without that sanction of the elders and consent of all the people, which were necessary for the condemnation of the rebellious and incorrigible. And, secondly, that viewed even in the most favourable light, the rashness of Jephthah affords a warning against all unlawful tampering in finite creatures with the course of future events ; especially when the happiness and interests of others may be involved. Jephthah had as little the right, as he doubtless had the inclination, to doom his daughter to barrenness, and his own health to desolation ; and in this even mitigated calamity his presumptuous vow no doubt found its sufficient punishment.

Let us notice, however, with its due commendation, the resigned and dutiful spirit displayed by her, who, "forasmuch as her father had opened his mouth unto the Lord, and the Lord had taken vengeance" through him of the enemies of his country—was content—(if not indeed to perish in the bloom of her days)—to wander a disconsolate recluse on the mountains, far from home and kindred, and cut off from the sweetest sympathies and dearest hopes of woman! Of this it may at least be said, (as was predicted of another act of yet higher duty exercised towards our blessed Lord), that wherever the word of God is read "there shall this which she hath done, be told for a memorial of her;" and an example to the remotest days, of amiable submission to even the most unwarrantable stretch of parental authority.

But we must pass on to the latter years of Jephthah, the brief remainder of which were probably embittered, if not actually shortened, by remorse for the past. By whom was his peaceful possession of supreme power very early questioned and disturbed?

MARY. By the men of Ephraim. They must have been quarrelsome people, for they envied and abused Gideon, and now they were angry with Jephthah for conquering without them. As

he says, Why did they not help him when he really required it, instead of finding fault now? But he need not have gone to war about it, and killed forty-two thousand men, and his own countrymen too!

MAMA. A lamentable instance of what has often been remarked, viz. that conflicts between brethren exceed all others in mutual ferocity. This was, like too many, a contest about words, (for the Ephraimites had spoken disparagingly of the Gileadites as fugitives); and by a word was it cruelly visited, and upon fugitives also, when the Ephraimites had, in their turn, become such. What test did the vindictive Gileadites fall on to discover their flying brethren?

MARY. To see if they could say "Shibboleth" properly. Why was that word chosen?

MAMA. Because (as signifying "floods of water") it would naturally be used by such as requested a passage across the rigidly guarded "swellings of Jordan."

MARY. And why, I wonder, could the poor Ephraimites not say it like the others?

MAMA. No one, Mary, who has heard (like yourself) the various dialects prevailing in England, Scotland, and Ireland, nay, even in separate counties of each, need be astonished that tribes living on opposite sides of a river boundary should

use a different pronunciation. . . Have you forgotten how Peter was recognised for a "Galilean" by the High Priest's servant?

MARY. Oh! no—"his speech bewrayed him."

MAMA. Well! "the Galilee beyond Jordan," whose language he spoke, was separated from Jerusalem by precisely the same distance and natural boundaries, which severed a few centuries earlier the position and dialect of Gilead and Ephraim. So immutable and permanent are natural distinctions and dissimilarities among men!

How long did Jephthah survive this unwarrantable act of severity towards his brethren?

MARY. Not long, I suppose, for he only judged Israel six years; while most of the former judges reigned twenty or thirty. And those that came after, had short reigns too; but they had prodigious families—one thirty and another forty sons! I suppose they must all have been judges or great men, as well as their father.

MAMA. What leads you to infer this?

MARY. Because they "rode on forty asscolts," and I know now that this was a mark of honour reserved for kings and great people.

MAMA. Had *many* known, or chosen to know it—the profane scoffing, of which a similar incident in the New Testament has been made the subject, would not have redounded (as all such

light jests do) to the shame of their ignorant and senseless authors. And while thus finding, even in the veriest trifles recorded in Holy Writ, as well as in the narratives of modern travellers, hourly confirmation of its more important features—we may defy the whole host of cavillers and sceptics to quote from either one circumstance, calculated to throw the slightest portion of doubt or discredit on the word of “Him who cannot lie,” or the dictates of “Him who cannot err.”

MORNING THIRTEENTH.**LESSON—Judges, Chapters xiii. and xiv.**

MAMA. The life of the famous individual, of whose birth and early history we have this day been reading, calls, in a peculiar manner, for that distinction between the inspired and uninspired actions of God's chosen instruments, to which we alluded in the cases of Gideon and Jephthah ; and for want of attention to which this whole book of Judges has been perverted to suit the purposes of scoffers and infidels. From the occasional weakness, nay, even criminality, of those, whom their selection to be the champions of Israel never professed to raise above the failings of humanity—fools have not hesitated either to make “ God the author of sin,” by attributing directly to Him the imperfections of his fallible agents ; or, if their impiety could not carry them thus far, to get out of the difficulty by denying the inspiration or authenticity of Scripture. There is no subject which *it is* more important to put on its only true or

Scriptural foundation ; so as to shew to its simplest readers the futility and inconsistency of expecting, from the incomplete measure of divine revelation vouchsafed to the most favoured individuals under the Old Testament, an exemption from sins and passions, which the whole ample discoveries of the New, aided by the bright example of perfection afforded by the human character of our Lord, have never sufficed to produce. Those who only draw from the transgressions of Gideon, of Samson, or of David, matter for arraigning either the wisdom or truth of the Most High, would do well to try, by even that avowedly imperfect standard, their own far scantier measure of piety, of obedience, of faith, of devotion to, and confidence in God.

This being premised and kept in view, the Christian is at full liberty to deduce, from the failings recorded professedly for his instruction, the warnings which similar faults in persons less highly distinguished could never have so solemnly enforced.

At what period of deep distress and oppression among his countrymen was the birth of Samson promised ?

MARY. When they had been delivered, for “ doing evil again in the sight of the Lord,” forty years into the hands of the Philistines. Who were they ?

MAMA. A maritime people, occupying the sea coasts of Canaan ; and though not one of the nations expressly devoted by the curse of God to destruction, yet idolaters, and, as such, interdicted from association with the Israelites ; a prohibition which we shall soon see, even in the case of the dedicated Samson, to have been frequently and fatally infringed. To what tribe did his father Manoah belong ?

MARY. He was of the Danites.

MAMA. Yes : and the Jews themselves are fond of considering what was prophesied by Jacob of the victories to be achieved by the " cunning and craft of Dan," as fulfilled in the history of this his most remarkable descendant. In what terms was his birth divinely announced to the barren and desponding wife of Manoah ?

MARY. It only says he should " begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." I thought he had done it altogether before he died.

MAMA. Nay, Mary ; his being in captivity to them at that very period, and the limited slaughter his last efforts caused of the inmates of a single building, sufficiently corroborate the exact truth of the prediction. The Philistines continued, in spite of the various ways in which Samson was enabled to harass and distress them, a powerful people so late as the days of Saul.

By what singular consecration was the son of Manoaah, even before his birth, devoted to the office of performing God's "strange work" upon his enemies?

MARY. He was to be a "Nazarite to God from the womb." Were refraining from wine, and unclean food, and not cutting the hair, the only things that made Nazarites differ from other people?

MAMA. Nay: these outward observances were only intended as symbols of inward purity and dedication to God's service. Similar vows were very common among the Jews, either for life (as in the case of Samson), or for a limited period. Nor does the pure light of Christianity seem to have immediately superseded them. Do you recollect any eminent Christian who, in fulfilment of just such an engagement, did the exact reverse of *one* of the things here enumerated as the outward marks of a Nazarite?

MARY. Let me think: oh! I remember; when learning my daily verse in the Acts lately, I wondered why Paul should have "shorn his head in Cenchrea for a vow," and meant to ask you to explain it to me. Why did he do it?

MAMA. Probably as one of the harmless, though superfluous, compliances with Jewish customs, to which he, who, for the Gospel's sake, became "all


things to all men," sometimes condescended. But we must return to the praiseworthy faith and piety of Manoah: Did he for a moment question the reality of the divine revelation made to his wife?

MARY. Oh, no! on the contrary, he begged the angel might come back to teach them "what to do to the child that should be born." Mama, this man and his wife were better people than Abraham and Sarah.

MAMA. In this instance, certainly, their faith (under far greater disadvantages), was both more implicit and wonderful; though this book, as well as the whole experience afforded by Scripture of human nature, shews us the error that would arise from estimating characters by individual acts, either of vice or virtue. But the solicitude of Manoah for the suitable education of the offspring to be sent by God, is still more rare and commendable. With what remarkable additions were the former directions of the angel repeated?

MARY. The mother herself was to be a Nazarene too, and to beware of all the things that were forbidden to the child.

MAMA. A mysterious command, Mary; but one from which parents among ourselves may derive deep instruction. "Can a clean thing come out of an unclean?" is the searching question of



Scripture to every irreligious or careless parent ; and of mothers especially, it may be said, that if the fountain whence a child's first impressions and ideas are universally derived, be polluted, the merciful provision made by God for its growth in grace and virtue is as cruelly and fatally frustrated, as if (with a cruelty all would shrink from) she fed it from the cradle with poisoned or insufficient food !

How did Manoah seek to testify his gratitude to this bearer of " glad tidings of great joy ?"

MARY. He wished to detain the angel, and, like Gideon, he surely took him for a man, as he offered to " make ready a kid for him." But his wife knew better : from the first *she* thought him " like an angel."

MAMA. And whom do *you* suppose the " angel" here spoken of to have been ?

MARY. I should have thought at once it was Christ himself ; but then he does not say " Offer your burnt-offering to *me*," but " Offer it to *the Lord* ;" and this looks as if the speaker was only an angel.

MAMA. I am glad you have observed a slight difficulty, arising only from difference of idiom between the English and Hebrew. But there is one word, the more exact translation of which in the margin of the Bible, proves at once the divinity of

the heavenly visitor. What was his answer, when, with dutiful reverence, Manoah inquired his name?

MARY. It seems rather a strange one. He says, "Why askest thou after my name, seeing it is *secret*?" That is surely the very reason for wishing to know any thing.

MAMA. Yes, Mary; but we are told the proper translation of the word "*secret*" here, should be "*wonderful*;" and to whom, alone, have you heard it as a "*name*" applied?

MARY. To our Lord, Mama. You know "*His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor,*" &c.

MAMA. Very well remembered. And how did the Son of God, on this occasion, vindicate his claim to the stupendous title?

MARY. By "*doing wonderously*;" for while Manoah and his wife were offering their sacrifice, He ascended to heaven in the flame of the altar. No wonder they *both* "*fell on their faces to the ground*" when they saw it; but how much more sensibly the wife behaved than her cowardly husband!

MAMA. Yes: she appears, from her sound and masculine understanding, and strong faith, to have been a suitable parent for the prodigy of strength and *occasional* trust in God whom it was her lot to bring into the world.

MARY. It says, "the Spirit of God began to move Samson *at times*." I suppose it was then only that he behaved well.

MAMA. I fear you have not attended sufficiently to what I said lately on the subject of the particular sort of "inspiration" mentioned in this book; else you would have known that it had nothing to do with vice or virtue, but only implied power from God to perform acts of signal or supernatural valour. Every part of the history of Samson puts this in the clearest light. What was the first decisive proof that his ordinary actions were by no means under spiritual direction?

MARY. Oh, foolish Samson! He chose a wife from among the wicked Philistines! No wonder it vexed his good father and mother. How *could* they think it was "of the Lord?"

MAMA. Just from adverting (which you do not,) to the design of God, to make Samson a "snare" and a "scourge" to His enemies. In furtherance of this object, these pious people were even content to bow to the wayward will of their gifted son. By what uncommon instance of strength must his own faith in his miraculous mission have been confirmed?

MARY. By his "rending a young lion as if it had been a kid."

MAMA. And with what singular inhabitants

did he find the carcass of the lion he had slain, some time afterwards peopled ?

MARY. A swarm of bees ; and they had made honey there ! Mama, this was surely a miracle too ! and the honey could not be good ; for I read lately, that bees so hate the smell of carrion, that if a mouse dies in the hive, and is too big to be carried out, they plaster the body over with some sort of mortar, to keep it fresh.

MAMA. I am always glad to hear you apply your little stock of general knowledge to the elucidation of Scripture. But as it was "after a time," sufficient both for the courtship of Samson at Timnath, and some stay at home, that he subsequently returned to carry back his wife, and, as in those hot countries a very few days would have reduced to a dry scentless framework of bones the skeleton of the lion, there is nothing in the choice of it by the bees for a shelter, inconsistent with your knowledge of the fastidious habits of those curious little creatures. Travellers tell us that their natural hives are as various as the countries they inhabit ; and to a fallen and hollow tree, one of their most favourite resorts, the prostrate carcass of the lion may have borne some resemblance.

MARY. Mama, I should have thought the riddle of Samson, to puzzle the guests at his wedding-

feast, as childish as Jotham's fable of the bramble, only you told me such things were common in those days.

MAMA. Yes, and in those countries even to the days we live in. The Greeks, a far more polished people than either the Jews or Philistines, made great use of enigmas in their entertainments, to sharpen and exercise the wit of the guests. But the riddle of Samson had a deeper and more malicious object.

MARY. Yes, and a more greedy one; to win clothes from his companions; for he knew it was impossible they should ever find it out.

MAMA. Except by the method they took, of first intimidating his wife, and then, by her means, extorting the secret from him. You see here the disastrous consequences of an unhallowed alliance! domestic discord and treachery, defeat and disgrace to the champion of Israel, the innocent slaughtered to discharge an iniquitous gambling debt, and the heathen wife, in whom the parents of Samson had truly seen a "firebrand" between the camps of Philistia and of Israel, ignominiously taken from the man she had betrayed, and given to his "own familiar friend!" Yet all this mass of sin and misery was God pleased to overrule, as he ever does, the "unruly wills and affections of sinful men," to the furtherance of His own de-

signs, and the promotion of his honour "upon his enemies."

MARY. I am quite glad you told me the "Spirit of the Lord" coming on Samson only meant his being made strong, for I don't think it could be right in him to kill thirty people (even Philistines,) to pay his wager with their clothes.

MAMA. Certainly not; and bitterly was visited on Samson, even in this world, that treacherous exasperation of Philistine enmity which his own fierce temper was allowed, for God's purposes, to stir up between nations intended by *Him* to be hostile. Whoever can presume to make Jehovah responsible, for either the ferocious passions or idle caprices of Samson, must overlook His dreadful personal chastisements of that erring, though not altogether forsaken servant; humiliation, blindness, insult, and captivity, terminating in a violent and self-inflicted death!

MORNING FOURTEENTH.

LESSON—Judges, Chapters xv. and xvi.

MAMA. Our last reading, my dear Mary, closed with a review of the temporal evils and mischiefs resulting from the first unhallowed alliance of Samson ; and an anticipation of the disastrous consequences to himself (however overruled by God for His own higher purposes,) which arose from his perseverance in similar connexions. How did he idly seek to renew ties, which the treachery of his wife and her friends, and his own violence, one would have thought, had for ever severed ?

MARY. He went to visit her with a kid. That was an odd present to make !

MAMA. By no means an uncommon one, in Holy Writ, on similar occasions, and esteemed to this day a great delicacy in the East. But we find it and its donor, alike repulsed by the incensed father of her whose countrymen had already paid so dearly for her indiscretion. How were they made to suffer yet more severely for this new insult, by Samson ?

MARY. In a very strange way! by putting firebrands to the tails of foxes, and driving them into the corn fields. Surely no one but himself could ever have dreamt of any thing so mischievous!

MAMA. On the contrary, we learn from heathen authors that the device was by no means unexampled among the ancients; and a custom is mentioned by the Roman poet Ovid, of turning out, once a year, foxes into the circus with burning torches on their backs, which some of the learned have construed into a commemoration of the exploit of Samson. But as readers less favourably disposed, have drawn inferences derogatory to the credit of Scripture, from the usual scarcity and shyness of foxes, which would render it difficult to collect and catch so many as 300—it is as well you should know that the word here signifies *Jackals*; an animal abundant all over the East, and whose habits of assembling in large flocks, and fearlessly entering gardens, and even villages, would admirably adapt them to the destructive purpose of Samson, and will account for their carrying devastation even into the “vineyards and olives.” But mark the retribution which, even in this world, overtook the treachery and perjury of his Philistine wife and her father. Their enraged countrymen, justly attributing to

these fertile sources of evil the public calamity, visited its authors with the corresponding penalty of "fire."

Did this summary catastrophe, over which a man of milder nature would have relented, disarm the vengeance of Samson?

MARY. Oh! no; he said, "Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you."

MAMA. And whose designs against His enemies did this indulgence of private enmity signal-ly promote?

MARY. The Lord's; or else Samson would never have been allowed to "smite them with a great slaughter."

MAMA. True; but were the gracious designs of God, in thus harassing their enemies, duly appreciated and seconded by the oppressed children of Israel?

MARY. No; for when the Philistines came up into Judah to try and take Samson, his cowardly countrymen wanted to bind him, and give him up to them. They did not deserve to have such a champion!

MAMA. And how were their unpatriotic designs frustrated?

MARY. By "the Spirit of the Lord coming mightily upon Samson," and his breaking like flax the two new cords with which the men of Judah

had bound him. I wonder, considering his temper, he did not kill them first.

MAMA. That would indeed have been to misuse the supernatural strength bestowed on him for a different purpose ! What did it now enable him to achieve ?

MARY. To slay a thousand men with the jaw-bone of an ass. This was certainly a miracle, Mama ; was it not ?

MAMA. Yes, perfectly miraculous ; yet not more so than all the corresponding parts of Samson's history ; and it is the apparently ignoble weapon alone, which has exposed the circumstance to more of profane incredulity than those of carrying off the iron gates of Gaza, or burying in its ruins the proud temple of Dagon. To the miracle itself, we have the attestation afforded by the name of "*Lehi*" (signifying a jaw-bone), which adhered to the spot for ages after ; and modern travellers say, that there is yet to be seen there a fountain called the "*Fountain of the Jaw*," supposed to have been the one here mentioned as springing miraculously, not from the bone itself (as our translation would seem to express), but from the spot thus named by Samson on casting it away. This last interpretation removes one of the cavils (idle indeed, and unimportant) against the miracle ; while it is pleasing to think that a

traditional memorial should, as in the similar case of the smitten rock of Moses, remain to bear witness to the power of the Most High. That it subsisted at the time the book of Judges was written, is expressly mentioned in the 19th verse, where it is stated, that the "well of him that called, or cried" (which "*Enhakkore*" signifies), was "*in Lehi*" to that day.

How long after this event did Samson continue, unmolested, it would appear, by the Philistines, to judge Israel?

MARY. Twenty years. What a pity he should, at the end of that time, when he was so much older and wiser, fall again into the snares of wicked Philistine women!

MAMA. This was but a natural punishment of his breach of God's command against intercourse with idolaters, which, as a lawgiver, he was bound to have enforced. How did the men of Gaza take advantage of his sinful weakness?

MARY. They thought they had him secure by locking the gates of their town; but he carried them, posts, and bar, and all, to the top of the hill before Hebron. How far was that?

MAMA. Hebron itself was twenty miles from Gaza; but the hill, which was on the road, might not have exceeded half that distance.

MARY. I wonder God gave him strength to

escape ! He had no business to be in a Philistine town at all.

MAMA. If Samson's person or merits had had any share in God's design of enabling him as His instrument to humble the Philistines, your wonder might be excused ; though even in this point of view, His justice was soon vindicated by the deeper fall into guilt and misery in which present impunity involved Samson. So far from being inclined to arraign (as some have presumptuously done) the perfections of the Most High, from his supposed favour to so faulty a character, I do not know that all Scripture affords a more impressive example of temporal chastisement uniformly ensuing on that "sin" whose "wages" were, in this case, not only intolerable captivity, but a violent death.

Did the narrow escape of Samson from Gaza wean his foolish heart from those toils of the "strange woman," the road to whose house is emphatically called by Solomon, "the way to hell?"

MARY. Oh ! no ; Delilah was the worst of all, for she was ready to sell his life for eleven hundred pieces of silver. Mama, surely Samson was infatuated to tell her the truth at last ; for each time he put her off with pretences, she brought his enemies to take him. How could he be so silly as to let out his secret to such a creature ?

MAMA. Not more so than thousands, Mary, who surrender to mercenary beings, equally bent on their ruin, not liberty or temporal life alone, but the principles and hopes of an immortal soul. Samson seems from the first to have had misgivings of Delilah's treachery, which, indeed, she took little pains to disguise; but far, far indeed is his from being the first or last sinful attachment strong enough to overcome even the instinct of self-preservation implanted in man by his merciful Creator. It is evident that, rather than lose a woman, for whom it was impossible he could feel the slightest esteem or confidence, Samson was content to hazard his own life, and incur an infamous breach of his covenant with God; but it is equally evident, that, like many offenders of later times, frequent deliverances had hardened his heart, and prevented him from giving entire credit to his own words, that, if shorn of his mysterious locks, he should be weak as another man. This is plain from his saying, on awaking a prisoner from his last fatal slumber, "I will go out, as at other times, and shake myself; for he wist not that the Lord had departed from him." How grievous must have been his reflections when, a blinded and over-wrought captive, he "did grind," like a beast of burden, in the prison-house of his once despised foes!

MARY. Was it corn he ground, Mama? I thought, in the Bible times, that was women's work.

MAMA. Female slaves were certainly often employed in it, but so were malefactors; and it was a task by which the humiliation of their sightless prisoner was, in the opinion of the proud Philistines, completed. But did God forget him in the "house of his bondage?" or rather have we not reason to believe he thence cried unto the Lord?

MARY. I don't know, Mama, unless the growing of his hair was a sign that God had not quite forsaken him, and that his strength would come back by degrees.

MAMA. You cannot suppose, Mary, that (except as a symbol or token of adherence to a Divine covenant) the hair of Samson had any thing to do with his supernatural strength. But as the re-appearance of this forfeited mark of allegiance would awaken in the breast of the humbled captive those hopes of forgiveness, from which experience proves that true repentance is most apt to arise, we may hope that it was in gracious acceptance of some such penitent feelings, that the last request of the sightless servant of God was granted. On what occasion of brutal triumph was it made?

MARY. The savage Philistines met to rejoice over Samson, and offer a sacrifice to Dagon their God ; and they said it was he who had delivered their enemy into their hands. I dare say God would have punished them for this, even though Samson had not repented.

MAMA. Very probably ; but as the vengeance (or at least his share in it) is represented in Scripture as the immediate effect of the prayer of Samson to God, we have no right to deny His erring servant the benefit of the charitable view which all Divines have taken of his penitence in affliction. For what very opposite and cruel purpose was he brought forth at the idolatrous festival ?

MARY. "To make sport" for the people. How could he do that ?

MAMA. Probably by exhibiting (at the command of his insulting taskmasters) some of those feats of returning strength, of which they were ere long to witness so awful a proof. Are you aware of that peculiar construction of many of the eastern temples and public buildings, which would involve (supposing the central pillars shaken) the spectators of a festival in the utter destruction here mentioned ?

MARY. I know the roofs were flat. Did people stand upon them to see any thing ?

MAMA. Yes—to witness the games, feats of wrestling, &c. frequently exhibited in the central area, round which a row of cloisters generally extended; the roofs of which, depending for support on the main pillars of the edifice, would, when these were thrown down, necessarily fall with them. How many people are said to have been “on” this “roof” (besides those who filled the temple itself) “beholding” while Samson “made sport” in the central arena?

MARY. Three thousand men and women. What a number to perish by one man!

MAMA. Or rather by the delegated power of God, working in a single individual. It is indeed a remarkable feature in the history of Samson, that while other champions of Israel were commissioned to act chiefly as leaders of their brethren, all the exploits of Samson were performed without human co-operation; thus making them more palpably “of the Lord,” while they had for their evident object, rather the humiliation of His enemies, than any permanent or extensive deliverance to His people.

This was peculiarly the case in the last signal exertion of Samson’s supernatural power. Its occurrence in an idolatrous temple, among a heathen nation, at the precise moment when its chief blasphemers were assembled to ascribe unto their

idol, the honour which belongeth to Jehovah alone, and their involvement in one sudden and fearful ruin, in which unassisted man could claim "neither part nor lot," would abundantly attest to Jew and Gentile, the truth too often forgotten by both, that the "Lord is King, let the heathen rage never so furiously."

What instruction may Christians chiefly derive from the chequered history of Samson, and its varied page of sin and suffering, of penitence and final triumph?

MARY. It has made me understand better that the great men of the Bible were not meant to be patterns of goodness, because if they had, they could not have been like us, and we should not have been made wiser by their faults. Surely no one who reads about Samson could ever put faith again in wicked women, or lose God's favour to please them; when all he got for it was being made a prisoner, and blind, and wretched! and when, though he did repent, and got leave to kill his enemies, that did not save him from dying miserably with them!

MAMA. Would that every reader, my dear Mary, drew from this much abused history, inferences as simple and salutary as your own; viewing in its erring hero a beacon set up by Eternal Truth, to warn succeeding generations

that, apart from God and His sanctifying influences, the "race is not" here below "to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor wisdom" even to men of the acutest natural "understanding."

MORNING FIFTEENTH.

LESSON—Judges, Chapters xvii. and xviii.

MAMA. We have in these two memorable chapters, perhaps as striking an example as any in Scripture of the rapid propagation of evil; of the easy transition from private to national corruption of true religion: and of the awful responsibility which may be incurred by individual alienation from, or even perversion of, the worship of God. The transaction, it must be premised, occurred at a period considerably earlier than that of which we have latterly been reading; before the establishment of regular Judges over all Israel, and while the yet unsettled tribes, under their own respective heads, did (as is said in verse 6th) “every man what was right in his own eyes.”

Of what tribe was the man whose domestic idolatry proved (in the words of Scripture) “how great a matter a little fire kindleth?”

MARY. He was a man of mount Ephraim.

MAMA. And do you recollect to what lengths

of apostasy that guilty tribe ultimately proceeded, or in what solemn terms it was denounced by Him who had long fruitlessly said, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?"

MARY. I do remember it, it was so awful. "Ephraim is joined to his idols—let him alone."

MAMA. Words indeed hardly to be forgotten, when pronounced of any of us helpless human creatures, whom the restraining hand of grace alone can save from "going down alive into the pit."

By what act of filial impiety was Micah's desertion of God's altar for his own devices, appropriately ushered in?

MARY. Robbing his mother of eleven hundred shekels of silver. I fear she was little better than himself, for she "cursed" about the loss of her money.

MAMA. Your accusation is natural, from the words of our translation. But the original imports quite another thing, viz. that she laid under a judicial curse the individual of her household who should have taken and concealed her property; an imprecation which, on the confession of her son, she quickly converted into a blessing.

MARY. She might have spared it, if she had thought how much more sin the money would be the cause of.

MAMA. But so far from deeming sinful the mitigated form of idolatry which her son was about to set up, this misguided woman had herself designed the silver for a “graven image and a molten image!” How does it appear that she deluded herself into a belief of her intention being praiseworthy?

MARY. She says she had dedicated them “un-*to the Lord.*” Did she never read the second commandment, about “graven images?”

MAMA. Mary! your question, somewhat childish, for one who might know, that in those days, aye, for centuries after, the *readers* of Scripture were confined to a small and privileged number—recalls us to what can never be often enough prized and commemorated, viz. our inestimable advantages of spiritual instruction. Remote from Shiloh, where alone the Ark and Testimony of God resided—indisposed by indolence, to resort thither—the family of Micah were so destitute of religious knowledge, as to think of propitiating the (to them) “unknown God” of Israel by graven images; to consecrate one of their own household a priest, to Him who had “chosen the sons of Aaron to stand before him for ever,” and to grasp at a young vagrant Levite (as ignorant and more inexcusable than themselves) as a “father”

sent from Heaven to preside over their unauthorised service !

MARY. I am at a loss to know what the image could be which Micah's mother told the "founder" to make for her. She speaks of *the Lord* as if she was not an idolater ; and yet her son must have been one, for it says that Micah " had an house of gods."

MAMA. Both were in so far true, that though Jehovah seems still to have been the object of their ignorant worship, they offered it through the forbidden medium of visible images. But did this "setting up" in His place of something that God had expressly forbidden, complete the convenient imitation of holy things, by which Micah sought to atone for his slothful absence from the sanctuary of God?

MARY. No, he "made an ephod." That was a consecrated garment I know, for little Samuel wore one from his cradle ; but what were "teraphim?"

MAMA. A species of images, by which it has been thought he intended to imitate the two cherubims which adorned the ark of the covenant ; and thus lend a mimic glory to his, alas ! wholly unsanctified mockery of the "place where God had put his name to dwell there."

MARY. How could *he* "consecrate his son to be a priest?"

MAMA. He who (as we remarked once of Jeroboam) imagined himself able to "set up" gods, and a form of religion, might well be guilty of the lesser presumption of constituting ministers. Yet we find that misgivings of his son's insufficiency induced Micah eagerly to embrace the first opportunity of purchasing for his sin the countenance of an authorized servant of the sanctuary. Who was he?

MARY. A "young man of the family of Judah." How could one of another tribe be a *Levite*?

MAMA. I am glad you inquired into the seeming inconsistency. The Levites, you know, were appointed to dwell in *all* the tribes of Israel, in cities set apart for their express residence; and Bethlehem Judah was this young son of Levi's allotted abode; had not "a truant disposition," and probably some errors in conduct there, driven him forth, a wanderer and an outcast, to seek and find, in a vagrant life, the fertile occasions of sin. How did these now present themselves?

MARY. By Micah asking him to be his priest, and offering him clothes, and wages, and victuals. I daresay they were very welcome to one who had no home.

MAMA. Of course ; but should they have blinded one, brought up in the fear, and set apart for the service of the Lord, to the sin of assuming the priesthood (to which as a mere Levite he had no claim) ; of presiding over forbidden image worship, and settling himself, for worldly considerations, at a distance from his appointed scene of duty, in the family of an idolater ? Yet so completely can self-interest and self-love obscure the plainest dictates of reason and revelation, that not only was the young man "content to dwell with Micah and be his priest," but the latter allowed himself to regard as an express token of favour from the God he was disobeying, that he should have fallen on one of his servants to abet him in his sacrilegious impiety ! It is good for us to trace, in the conduct of another, the lengths of self-deception to which a combination of wilful ignorance, carnal indolence, and spiritual pride may carry any one among ourselves. Supposed improvements on the commanded service of God, or mere substitutes for it, did not cease with the dark days of Micah ; and there are few founders of sects, however absurd or impious, who have not (like him) been able to persuade themselves, that, in superseding his plain precepts, they "did God service."

We shall now see that the delusion was not con-

finer to the infatuated Micah, and his household. How came the tribe of Dan to have yet to seek an inheritance? Had none been assigned them?

MARY. Surely it had; though I don't think we read about it.

MAMA. No, it was in a chapter of Joshua, omitted as merely containing similar details. But a reference to it enables us to see that sinful want of faith and activity to conquer the greater part of their allotted territory, had straitened them for room, and forced them to attempt an establishment elsewhere; and it was in prosecution of this design that the events occurred which we are about to discuss. What was the object of the five men who sought hospitality from Micah?

MARY. "To search the land." Mama! I wonder how they could know the voice of the young Levite; had they seen him before?

MAMA. Probably not, yet his dialect, as a dweller in Judah, might (as we lately saw in the case of the Gileadites) have sufficiently differed from that of Ephraim, to betray his being a stranger there. But what sad proof did their conduct to him soon afford that ignorance of God, and his appointed service, was shared by the Danites with the inhabitants of Ephraim?

MARY. I suppose their bidding the Levite "ask counsel for them of God." They might have

known that He would not be "inquired of" by such as him, or in any place except Shiloh.

MAMA. Certainly; yet the reference to Divine guidance shews a sense (though erroneous) of religion, and is less reprehensible than the presumption of that "blind leader of the blind," who must have taken upon himself to furnish the answer.

MARY. But, Mama, it came true.

MAMA. Yes, like many similar unauthorised oracles, its encouraging tenor probably contributed (together with the facility of the enterprise itself), to ensure success. In what state were the unsuspecting people of Laish?

MARY. " Dwelling carelessly," with no " magistrate" over them, or any one to help them.

MAMA. And of what nature was the country thus exposed to invaders?

MARY. " A large land, a place where there is no want of any thing that is in the earth."

MAMA. Tempting news these, for a people straitened on every side by powerful enemies, and hemmed up by them into a mountainous, and probably barren district. How many warriors were sent to make this desirable conquest?

MARY. " Six hundred men, appointed with weapons of war." But what a shameful return it was in the " five men" who had been entertain-

ed by Micah to put it in their brethren's head to take away his images !

MAMA. And what a fearful proneness to idolatry did it manifest, when the bare idea of possessing such forbidden treasures, could not only sanction, but justify, in their eyes, an act of shameless robbery ! But were they content with forcibly carrying off the household gods of Micah ?

MARY. No, they bribed away his very Levite, by telling him how much better it was to be priest to a whole tribe than to one family. And the ungrateful creature went, and it says "his heart was glad."

MAMA. And can ingratitude to man surprise you, in a minister of the sanctuary, who had first forgotten, and then dishonoured his God ? Interest, hope of gain and preferment, first attached him to the family of Micah ; and, for greater gain, and more gratified ambition, he betrayed, and left his benefactor without a sigh. What effect had the whole iniquitous transaction on Micah, and his superstitious neighbours ?

MARY. Mama, one can hardly help being sorry for him, when he says, " Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest ; and what have I more ?"

MAMA. Yes, if the blasphemous absurdity of the charge, as it sounds on a Christian ear, were

not enough to stifle all sympathy. "My gods which I made!" Is there not, in the expression itself, wherewithal to rebuke the gross folly which gave it birth? To grieve over that as an *object of worship*, which it was in the power of "thieves to break through and steal," does not all this seem to us the extreme of childishness; and warrant the conclusion that the fatal prevalence of idolatry must have been founded on something congenial to it in the corruption of the heart of man, rather than on that human reason to which it offers one perpetual insult?

But did the idle lamentations of Micah procure the restoration of those images, whose loss was, after all, but a just retribution for his own robbery of his mother?

MARY. Oh! no—he was advised to hold his tongue, or else his life might have been taken too.

MAMA. Yes—for in those days, as we read, there was "no magistrate," by whom the spoilers might have been compelled to relinquish their prize. Whither did their unhallowed spoil accompany them?

MARY. To Laish; and they killed the poor quiet secure people, and burnt their town, and built another, and called it "Dan."

MAMA. Does the erection here of Micah's

“ images” recall to you any later event of the same kind, by which Dan was rendered unhappily famous in Israel ?

MARY. Let me think. Was not one of Jeroboam’s calves set up at Dan, and one at Bethel ?

MAMA. Exactly ; and, as it is said here that image-worship prevailed in Dan, more or less, till the captivity, we may trace to a lamentably remote period, the effects of this original transgression of the first great commandment of the law, by the single family of Micah.

Thus we are led to close, as we commenced, our remarks upon this day’s reading ; and derive from it the wholesome lesson, for which doubtless it was recorded in Holy Writ, viz. that the sins of individuals involve often a degree and extent of responsibility before which the most thoughtless would shrink, and the most hardened tremble. If Micah, to save himself the trouble of worshipping (as every male in Israel was expressly commanded to do), three times a-year, in Shiloh, had not made forbidden idols ; if, to procure himself an unlawful livelihood, the vagabond Levite had not first become a partner in Micah’s guilt, and then, by a favourable response from an imaginary deity, flattered the ambition and avarice of a band of Danite robbers and plunderers, their whole tribe might have continued to worship God in his

appointed place and manner ; and Dan, instead of sharing the revolt of Jeroboam, and remaining for centuries a stronghold of idolatry, and a "reproach in Israel," might have come down to us, unstained by rebellion against its monarch, and apostasy from its God.

MORNING SIXTEENTH.

LESSON—Judges, Chapters xix, xx, & xxi.

MAMA. If our last reading, my dear Mary, instructively exemplified the extended iniquity, of which an individual transgression is too often the fertile parent, we have the same lesson yet more forcibly inculcated in the distressing history of to-day. To the conjugal infidelity of one of those inferior wives, whose toleration among the Jews we have so often had occasion to deplore, and whose servile origin and degraded station in the household of their husbands, deprived them of the strongest motives to irreproachable conduct in women, may be traced not only the brutal inhospitality of the inhabitants of Gibeah; the savage ferocity with which it was avenged by the incensed Benjamites, and the retaliatory slaughter (almost to extermination of the latter tribe), but the unjustifiable violence with which hundreds of innocent maidens were made to expiate, by unmerited separation from their own parents, the guilt of one

who took refuge with her's from the just anger of an offended husband.

Of what tribe was the individual thus injured?

MARY. A Levite of Mount Ephraim. Should his wife not have been of that tribe also?

MAMA. Undoubtedly ; and one of the evils, as we have seen, of this description of marriages, was indifference to the country, or even religion, of the woman. But do you recollect the fearful punishment to which wives (even of this subordinate class), were liable, by the law of Moses, when convicted of adultery?

MARY. Oh! yes, they might be stoned to death ; like the woman, you know, in the New Testament, that was brought before our Lord. It was no wonder the Levite's wife ran away for fear of it.

MAMA. But was it not wonderful that a husband, so grievously offended, should (in the spirit of our gracious Master) have shown himself so mild and forgiving ; and have sought, by kindness, to reclaim his sinning partner? Well did such forbearance merit the gratitude it seems to have excited in the penitent wife and her father, as showed by the latter's repeated attempts to detain his son-in-law. But we have, in the sequel of the history, a sad and striking proof that, when most amply pardoned by man, the well-nigh

forgotten "sin" will "find out," and rise up against even a repentant transgressor; and, in this case, the punishment was brought about (though unintentionally), by the imprudence of the reconciled husband himself.

To what unnecessary danger did his obstinacy, in departing at a late hour, expose the travellers?

MARY. It first nearly obliged him to stop for the night at Jebus; and you know that town belonged still to the heathen Jebusites. But it seems hard that after refusing to stay among idolaters, he should have been worse used among his own people.

MAMA. That it fared worse with him in consequence, is not likely; as, in all probability, the gross iniquity of Gibeah arose from its near neighbourhood to the Canaanite city of Jebus; while the existence of the latter, in the heart of Israel, may be traced (as we have already seen), to the indolence and cowardice of those very Benjamites on whom God was ere long to be so signally avenged! Did so much as one of this tribe (to whom the city of Gibeah belonged), vindicate its character for kindness and hospitality?

MARY. Oh! no; nobody asked the Levite in, except an old countryman of his own, from "Mount Ephraim," coming "from his work out of the field at even."

MAMA. Poor he may probably have been in worldly circumstances, but "rich in good works; and willing to communicate," as is proved by his warm and liberal salutation; while his piety may be inferred from his readiness to entertain a servant of the sanctuary, then on his way to Shiloh to offer (it is supposed) before the Lord, an atoning sacrifice for the guilt of his erring wife. But the poor creature's fatal deviation from duty was about to be visited with fearful retribution, by the very sinful passions which had first made her an alien from her husband's protecting roof. Thrust out (as an hostage for the lives of all within); from that of the friendly Ephraimite, she soon fell a sacrifice to a cruelty, at which many are disposed to shudder, who think little of the more lingering misery to which human vices daily consign their thousands of wretched victims.

How did this heart-rending catastrophe affect the unhappy husband?

MARY. Mama, I think he was hardly less cruel than those who killed her, when he could cut her up in twelve pieces and send her, "together with her bones, into all the coasts of Israel."

MAMA. The expedient, shocking as it seems to us, was by no means unexampled, and probably designed to express, by its very fearfulness, the ardour of his thirst for revenge.

We have many instances in scripture and ancient history, of animals thus divided and distributed among allies, as incentives to mutual support; and, by sending a portion also to "Benjamin," it is plain the Levite meant to consider even the heads of the offending tribe, as involved in the duty of procuring him justice. Whatever we may think of the bloody summons, it completely answered its purpose; first, by exciting universal attention and horror; and then, by uniting "all Israel as one man" before the Lord, to whom, as supreme arbiter (for you remember this happened when there were no judges), the case was to be solemnly referred.

How numerous was the warlike assemblage thus arrayed by the wrongs of one heart-broken husband?

MARY. "Four hundred thousand footmen that drew sword!" I don't think, in spite of the "piece" sent to *them*, that any Benjamites were among them, for it only says, they had "*heard* that the children of Israel were gone up to Mizpeh."

MAMA. No; either conscious shame for, or participation in the guilt of their clansmen, withheld them from the national inquest. What effect had the simple tale of the bereaved Levite on his assembled countrymen?

MARY. They were "knit together as one man" to go up against Gibeah. But they really behaved better than one would have expected from people so angry ; for they sent messengers first to try and get the persons who had done the wickedness put to death, before they punished the whole tribe.

MAMA. And was this wise and equitable proposition acceded to ?

MARY. No, no ; " the Benjamites would not hearken to the voice of their brethren, but gathered themselves to go out to battle." Nobody could be sorry for them *now* !

MAMA. No ; because they thus solemnly sanctioned and defended the guilt it was their duty to have denounced and abjured. What number of fighting men was this (the least tribe in Israel) enabled to muster against the national army ?

MARY. " Twenty-six thousand," besides the seven hundred wicked men of Gibeah, who deserved to be all killed. But why were seven hundred chosen left-handed ?

MAMA. For the superior facility thus afforded in the use of the sling, a weapon to which, insignificant as it appears, the Israelites had been chiefly reduced, by the policy of their heathen oppressors, in depriving them (as we have lately read) of swords and spears. That, when dexterously wielded, it could prove unerring, we have an in-

stance in the case of David and Goliath ; and heathen authors mention the diligence of various nations in training their children from the cradle to this primitive species of warfare.

MARY. Mama ! I cannot help being much surprised that the wicked Benjamites twice got the better of the children of Israel ; who, besides being so much in the right, were twenty times as many !

MAMA. It would indeed be surprising, were it not that those very circumstances (*viz.* their righteous cause, and overwhelming numbers) to which you allude, are supposed to have created in them an over-weening confidence, which He who “ seeth not as man seeth,” saw fit to humble by repeated discomfitures.

MARY. But they had “ asked counsel of God” even at the very first ; and that was what made me wonder they should not succeed.

MAMA. I am glad you thus bore in mind the usual scriptural connexion between acknowledgment of God and consequent victory. But the reference to the Almighty seems, in the first instance, to have been slight and formal ; merely relating to the precise order of battle, and not invoking the blessing of the God of armies, or what might then have been styled a “ holy war.”

MARY. But, after the first defeat, they “ wept before the Lord until even.” They were surely

sincere and religious then, and yet they lost another battle.

MAMA. Even if we give them credit for a sincerity of which none but He who reads the heart can judge, and, were we able to discriminate between tears of shame and sorrow, and those of genuine humiliation before God, there might still be need in this case for farther demonstration, that the "battle is not always to the strong," before thorough conviction could ensue, that neither the justice of their quarrel nor the force of the number could (apart from the Divine co-operation) secure them the hoped-for triumph. We knew not what vindictive and unbrotherly feelings might lurk beneath the mask of equity, to mar and deface in the sight of God the apparently sacred work of retribution; but one circumstance we *do* know, by which the character of the Israelites' *second* humiliation was materially changed, and by which it was probably at length rendered effectual. Can you find me this from the words of the narrative?

MARY. Oh! I see *many* things that shew they were in earnest at last, and really humbled before God. They "fasted this time until even, and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings before the Lord."

MAMA. Yes; to the tardy fulfilment of an

indispensible religious duty, on all solemn occasions (for “without shedding of blood,” says the scripture, “there is no remission,”) we are authorized to attribute the signal success which, when thus propitiated in *His own appointed way*, God at length vouchsafed to promise to His penitent people. But the inquiry itself, on former occasions so hastily and slightly conducted, was now distinguished by another indispensable requisite, viz. the interposition of God’s High Priest ; whom, for the first time, we now hear of as standing “before the ark,” and fulfilling between the Lord and his people that mediatorial office without which prayer was then, as now, a mockery, and, “asking counsel of the Lord,” unauthorised presumption.

Who was the High Priest thus favourably replied to by Jehovah ?

MARY. Phinheas, the grandson of Aaron. Was he still alive so long after ?

MAMA. You forget what his being still in existence corroborates, viz. that we have lately gone back to a period but shortly subsequent to the death of Joshua, and prior, as I told you, to the appointment of Judges ; a circumstance arising from the more private and local character of the events recorded in the latter chapters of the book we are this day tracing to its close. And to this

conclusion we must hasten. What was the result of the protection of the Most High when at length acceptably invoked?

MARY. Oh! victory of course; for the Lord "destroyed that day twenty-five thousand, one hundred men of Benjamin before Israel." Mama! there were only twenty-six thousand seven hundred at first! This was a terrible slaughter!

MAMA. Yes, as we before remarked, it amounted almost to extermination. Such judgments has national wickedness the power to draw down; and thus was the justice of God vindicated from the apparent impunity allowed them in former conflicts. What was the refuge of the miserable remnant of six hundred men now left to Benjamin?

MARY. "They fled into the wilderness, and abode four months in the rock of Rimmon."

MAMA. And was the vengeance of Israel limited to the slaughter of the battle field?

MARY. No; they killed the very beasts; and they must have slain the women also, else they would not have been at a loss for wives to the six hundred remaining men. No wonder they were sorry when they came to think of what they had done. Surely God did not mean them to carry things so far.

MAMA. We might have been inclined to think

so, had it not been said below that it was "the Lord" who made that great "breach in Israel," which his mutable instruments so soon came to repent. But, whether proceeding from the excess of human severity, or the just decree of God, the event was, in the eyes of brethren, a national calamity, and, as such, both naturally and properly deplored. And we cannot wonder that bitter regrets should have mingled with the sacrifices, by which so painful a conquest was fearfully commemorated. Of the sinfulness and inconvenience of rash vows, we have a fresh proof in the inconsiderate engagement entered into at Mizpeh, that no Israelite should give his daughter to one of the tribe of Benjamin. In what dilemma did this unfraternal resolution involve the relenting Israelites?

MARY. They said, what "shall we do for wives to them that remain, seeing we have 'sworn by the Lord' that we will not give them of our daughters." Mama, surely, as we said about Jephthah, God would have been less angry if they had broken their word, than that even one person should be murdered to let them keep it.

MAMA. Unquestionably; but we learn from this choice of evils, the utility of our Lord's admonition, "Swear not at all;" evidently directed against unnecessary oaths, though perverted

by some to the withholding of testimony in courts of justice. What bloody expedient did the Israelites fall upon to keep their vow unbroken?

MARY. Killing all the people of Jabesh-gilead, to get their daughters for wives to the Benjamites. Mama, this was as bad as Samson killing the Philistines to get their clothes to pay his wager with.

MAMA. The cases are not quite similar; as by another stern oath, all who (like the people of Jabesh-gilead) absented themselves from the national muster, had been relentlessly doomed to destruction.

But in what more pleasing and brotherly spirit were the miserable Benjamite refugees re-admitted into the "commonwealth of Israel."

MARY. "The whole congregation sent some to speak to and to call peaceably unto them; and Benjamin came again at that time."

MAMA. How affecting is the inspired historian's simple record of a reconciliation fraught with such complicated emotions! And how pleasing is it (amid much to shudder over and condemn), to observe the solicitude of the nation for the brother, who, like the prodigal of scripture, had thus "been lost and was found." Not one of the other tribes even attempted to aggrandize itself by appropriating any part of the inheritance unpeopled

by the late calamity ; but, on the contrary, they sought to repair it as rapidly as possible, by providing the wretched remnant with wives. How was the requisite number at length completed ?

MARY. The Benjamites were advised to lie in wait for the daughters of Shiloh, when they should come out to dance in the vineyards. Was their dancing sinful or idolatrous that these girls were fixed on ?

MAMA. No ; on the contrary, it is supposed that the festival here alluded to was that of Tabernacles ; which, occurring in the season of the vintage, was always celebrated with great rejoicings. And Shiloh, the place where alone it could be lawfully celebrated, was of course pointed out as the scene of the intended violence. How was it to be palliated in the eyes of the justly incensed parents ?

MARY. The whole people were to beg them to pass it over for their sakes ; and to consider that they were saved by it from breaking their word, and giving the Benjamites wives voluntarily, when they had promised not.

MAMA. And thus ended in rapine and subterfuge, what had begun in adultery and elopement, and led (as we have sadly seen) to civil war, disgrace, and massacre ! Let us lay to heart, my dear Mary, the impressive lesson, that all this

occurred in Israel in those unhappy days "when there was no king, and where every man did that which was right in his own eyes." And, when we read (as yesterday) of idolatry flourishing amid contempt, and disuse of national religion; and (as to-day) of licentiousness and rapine arising from the absence of wholesome legal authority, let us draw fresh encouragment in these evil times to "fear God and honour the king." To bless Him, "from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift," for the boon of a pure and scriptural church; and to do homage to Him, "by whom kings reign," in the person of His appointed human vicegerent.

MORNING SEVENTEENTH.

LESSON—Ruth, Chapters i. and ii.

MARY. Oh! Mama, what a beautiful day's reading we have had! and how delightful it is to hear of sweet Ruth, and her dutiful behaviour to her mother, and her gleaning in the harvest-field, after all the fighting and wickedness we read of in the book of Judges!

MAMA. Your remark is very natural; and proves (independently of the more attractive nature of the subject) how infinitely deeper is the hold taken of our feelings by the simple history of individuals, than by the destiny of nations? But how, do you think, came the life of so humble a person as Ruth, to be recorded at such length, and in a separate form, in the Jewish Scriptures?

MARY. I never thought of that; or how a poor gleaner came to have the honour of a book to herself. Was it in reward of her duty and kindness to Naomi?

MAMA. These, though they brought, even in

this world, their own rich recompence, in prosperity, distinction, and knowledge of the true God; and though they doubtless indirectly contributed to the honourable place assigned in the Hebrew Canon to the memory of Ruth, are insufficient to account for it without a further circumstance in her history, which we will not anticipate, by considering to-day. In the mean time, let us be thankful for the example it sets before us, of the blessing of God on the two great duties of filial piety and cheerful industry; and strive to improve it by careful investigation.

At what period of the history of the Israelites are the events recorded in the book of Ruth, said to have happened?

MARY. "In the days when the Judges ruled." That is a wide word, Mama!

MAMA. And the precise period must ever remain in some degree uncertain; though learned men (from no other famine being specially mentioned) have been inclined to identify the one in the time of Gideon, with that which drove into exile the family of Elimelech. Of what tribe was this individual?

MARY. An Ephrathite of Beth-lehem-judah.

MAMA. For which latter place Ephratah was another name. But his *tribe*, viz. that of Judah, is what the future part of the history requires us

to bear in mind. What violation of the law of Moses was the first, and not unnatural, consequence of the residence of a Jewish family in a heathen land ?

MARY. Elimelech's two sons married women of Moab. I daresay this was because they continued there, as it says they did, even after their father's death. Surely the famine in their own country must have been over by that time, or else Boaz would not have had corn fields to glean in.

MAMA. A very just remark, Mary, and one with which I am much pleased. Necessity may compel, for a time, the servants of God to associate with unbelievers ; but no one, who has at heart either his safety or salvation, will prolong, voluntarily, so dangerous an intercourse.

How long were Mahlon and Chilion suffered to enjoy their unhallowed connexions ?

MARY. About ten years, and then they both died. Did God punish them for marrying heathen women ?

MAMA. It has been so conjectured by some expositors. But, as marriages among the Jews were contracted at a very early age, and under the immediate sanction of parental authority, I should be more inclined to read the Divine displeasure in the destitution and desolation of their surviving parent. But were this mere conjecture

even well-founded, we have in the issue, a remarkable proof of the power of the Almighty to bring good out of evil; and of his tender pity for a forlorn widow, by over-ruling, for her consolation and support, a connexion she must either have piously disapproved of, or sinfully connived at.

What was the first wish that arose in her bosom on finding herself (in the affecting words of Scripture) "left of her two sons and her husband?"

MARY. To "return from the country of Moab; for she had heard there how that the Lord had visited his people, in giving them bread." Do you think she had only just heard this?

MAMA. Perhaps not, Mary; but the warnings, nay invitations, to return to our "better country," and our "Father's house," which fall unheeded on the ear of prosperity and affluence, find a ready echo in the bereaved and desolate heart. How many, besides Naomi, have had cause to say with David, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted," and whom that very affliction improved and sanctified, has been the means of turning once more "with their faces Zion-ward!"

Who accompanied Naomi part of the way towards her beloved land of Judah?

MARY. Her two daughters-in-law. How beautifully she advises them to leave her, and return home to their mother's house, and wishes them

happiness with other husbands! Mama, Naomi must have been a good woman.

MAMA. We have every reason to think so, both from her constant pious reference to "the Lord" in her addresses to her widowed daughters, and from that great feature of an amiable character, the absence of selfishness; which made her not only dissuade them from sharing her poverty, but, inspired those touching words, "*Nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much, for your sakes, that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.*" For herself, she felt that her years were few, and her joys and sorrows alike buried in the grave; but she could look forward not only without bitterness, but with maternal sympathy to the more prosperous lot which might yet be in store for Ruth and Orpah.

MARY. Mama, what does she mean by asking if they would wait for her sons, were she even to have any? Could sisters-in-law marry their husbands' brothers?

MAMA. Not only were they authorized, but even obliged by the law of Moses, to form such connexions, in cases where no child remained to keep up the deceased brother's rights and name. The obligation, frequently alluded to in Scripture, as resting on the next brother, or (failing him) on the nearest relation, to marry the widow of the

elder branch of the family, is quite necessary to be known for the understanding of the latter part of Ruth's history. But do you not recollect a singular, and we should suppose imaginary case of the kind, on which our Lord's opinion was insidiously sought by those of his countrymen who disbelieved in a resurrection from the dead?

MARY. Oh, yes! about the seven brethren who all married one wife. I might have remembered that for its strangeness.

MAMA. I hope you remember the use made of it by our Lord, not only for confirming the reality of a resurrection, but for rectifying the absurd earthly notions entertained by those of the Jews who admitted one.

What effect had the disinterested counsels of Naomi on her two daughters-in-law?

MARY. They both wept again; and "Orpah kissed her mother in law, but Ruth clave unto her."

MAMA. How expressive are these few words! and how forcibly do they discriminate between the idle sympathy which evaporates in tears, and those substantial acts of duty and kindness which alone demonstrate its sincerity! Did Naomi, solitary and friendless as she was, at once selfishly grasp at the filial devotedness of Ruth?

MARY. Oh no, Mama; you know Naomi was

not selfish. So she still (though I am sure she must have wished to have her) advised Ruth to "go back to her people." But she surely could not be sincere in advising her to go back (like Orpah) "to her gods!"

MAMA. We should be very rash in imputing to the pious Naomi so unworthy an advice, as there is nothing said here of Ruth returning to *her* gods; and as it has been generally supposed that while both sisters had become in some measure proselytes from their sojourn in a Jewish family, the conversion of Ruth at least, was sincere and permanent. This seems proved not only by her decided adoption (which affection alone might have dictated) of the "God," as well as "people" of Naomi, but by her solemn adjuration of "the Lord do so to me and more also, if aught but death part thee and me;" which in the mouth of any but a converted Jewess would have been unmeaning and misplaced.

But let us pause a moment, my child, to bid our hearts expand in exquisite enjoyment of that declaration of Ruth's, whose inimitable pathos no mere human composition has ever equalled or approached. How does this devoted daughter, this "friend that sticketh closer than a brother," declare her unalterable resolution to cheer with her presence, in life and death, the solitary hearth of the returning wanderer?

MARY. Oh! I know it by heart, it is so beautiful; "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God!"

MAMA. And observe how the latter part of the glorious resolution, by which the whole was wound up and sanctified, had power to crown, with the richest spiritual blessings, the heroic adoption of poverty and exile contained in its former clauses. In sharing the lodging, and adhering to the fate of Naomi, want and misery (to be alleviated only by incessant toil), was the portion voluntarily chosen by Ruth. Among the "people" she said should henceforth be her own, the stranger Moabitess could find, as she well knew from rigid Jewish customs, "neither part nor inheritance." In affinity to the God of Naomi, could alone have consisted the superior value of the course she unhesitatingly embraced; and though filial affection, and the softest feelings of compassion for age and destitution no doubt influenced her determination, it was not the less accepted by Him whose influence on our hearts is best manifested by right principles in our conduct towards our fellow creatures...

MARY. Mama! how sad must have been Naomi's return to Beth-lehem without her hus-

band and sons! And she was so changed that people hardly knew her. What does she mean by bidding them call her "Mara," instead of "Naomi?"

MAMA. Because the latter name (which signifies "pleasant," or "comely"), she felt to be now sadly inapplicable to her saddened mind and shattered frame. But it is not the first time the name "Mara" has occurred in our reading: do you recollect its former application during the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness?

MARY. Oh! I remember, "Marah" was the name of a bitter fountain that nobody could drink of till Moses put a branch in to make it sweet. Does the word mean "bitterness?"

MAMA. It does; and well might the sad heart of one, all whose joys a few short years had sufficed to turn into sorrow, adopt the ominous appellation; so expressive at once of her mental feelings and external distress!

MARY. But, Mama, I don't exactly know why Naomi should have remained poor. The widow we read about who came back after the famine in Elisha's time, "cried to the king for her house and land," and got them.

MAMA. I am very glad you remember this; but the very circumstance of a prophet's intercession and a king's interposition being necessary to rem-

state the once wealthy and powerful Shunammite, will shew how little chance of justice the friendless Naomi could have had at a period when the often interrupted sway of the Judges left men but too much "to do what was right in their own eyes." Let us be thankful that we live in times when the rightful inheritance of the meanest is as secure as the possession of the prince!

But even by the Jewish law, on the death of Elimelech and his sons, his portion of land would have fallen to his nearest, and as we shall soon see, not unworthy relative. How was this amiable successor of Elimelech called?

MARY. Boaz; and he was a mighty man of wealth; just, I suppose, what Naomi's husband himself had once been.

MAMA. Yes, if we may conjecture from her own "bitter" sense of her reverses. To what degree of abject poverty had these reverses now reduced her and her daughter in law?

MARY. They must have been starving; for Ruth asked leave to go and glean in any body's field that would let her. Perhaps she did not know that the good God of the Jews had ordered corn to be left expressly for poor people.

MAMA. Or, more likely, she doubted her own right as a "stranger" to the merciful provision of Him, who, however, had made not only

kindness to the *persons*, but tenderness to the *feelings* of “strangers,” the subject of a beautiful precept ! How did her husband’s cousin (to whose field God, in His wisdom, directed her steps), testify his obedience to the beneficent injunction ?

MARY. By asking his servant, when he saw a strange “damsel,” at once, who she was ; and then speaking so kindly to her, and bidding her stay in *his* field and abide by his maidens, and telling her no one should hurt her, but she might glean where she pleased.

MAMA. Yes, my dear Mary ; there does indeed breathe the very soul of pious benevolence, as well as of pastoral simplicity, through the whole dialogue ; first between this patriarchal master and his reapers, (in which they mutually invoke on each other the blessing of God), and then between the same excellent man, “rich in good works and ready to communicate,” and the deserving object of his almost parental interest ! On what particulars in her conduct does he state this interest to have been founded ?

MARY. On her kind behaviour to her mother in law, and her leaving her own country and people to follow her back into Judah.

MAMA. True : but to what higher motive does he also ascribe this last part of her conduct ?

MARY. “Trusting under the wings of the Lord

God of Israel ;" and he prays God to recompense her fully for it.

MAMA. Little did he as yet foresee that he was to be made the instrument by whom the rich reward was to be conveyed ! In the mean time, what further privilege did her modest demeanour induce him to extend to her ?

MARY. He gave her leave to dine with his own reapers ; and the meal seems a very strange one—bread soaked in vinegar ! But I remember your telling me, when I wondered at the Jews offering our Lord " vinegar to drink," that it was only the " gall" mixed among it, which made it cruel or uncommon. How little the Jews' customs seem to have changed all through the Bible !

MAMA. Nay, how little have eastern customs changed to this day ! for the very primitive refreshment provided for the reapers of Boaz, is at this moment doled out by the Algerines to their Christian captives ; many of whom, I daresay, till their captivity, had wondered, and perhaps scoffed, at the simplicity of Scripture manners.

But we must return to Ruth. How was the indulgence of Boaz gradually extended ?

MARY. By letting her glean among the very shearers ; and even telling his people to let handfuls fall on purpose. Surely he must have begun to think of marrying her already.

MAMA. We have no reason for attributing to him, as yet, any such intention ; or assigning selfish motives for deeds of the purest benevolence. During the whole of the subsequent harvest, Boaz suffered her to continue in her humble vocation ; nor did the glaring disproportion in their age and circumstances allow him (while yet unaware of that pleasing combination of duty with esteem, which afterwards brought about their union) to think of allying himself in a manner unsuitable to his rank and station.

But how may we gather that this union was, even now, contemplated as possible by Naomi ?

MARY. She prays for a blessing on him from the Lord, and seems glad that Ruth had gleaned in his fields and received kindness from him, but I cannot find out any place where she seems to hope he would be her husband.

MAMA. This arises from the English expression, "The man is one of our next kinsmen," not conveying the full sense of the original Hebrew, "this man is one of our *redeemers*," meaning thereby, those in whom, by the law of Moses, the right of "redemption" of not only the lands, but the "wife" of a deceased relative rested. Naomi does not positively assert Boaz to be the *nearest* of kin (as indeed it afterwards appeared he was not,) but only so near as to make it highly probable the

restoration of the fortunes of her family and daughter-in-law might (with prudence) be brought about in his person.

The means by which this happy event was achieved, we shall learn to-morrow ; let us, in the mean time, observe the further acts of duty by which Ruth justified the benevolent predilection shewn her by Boaz, and contributed to her mother in law's support. What became of the produce of her labour, and his generosity ?

MARY. "She beat it out at night, when she had done gleaning, and gave Naomi all that was over serving herself;" and she minded her advice to "keep fast by the maidens of Boaz" all through the harvest ; and when that was over, it says, "she dwelt with her mother in law."

MAMA. Yes ; too happy if by patient industry, she had in any respect alleviated the pangs of poverty ; and content to banish, by her cheerful society, the yet bitterer evil of solitude. Unseduced from her humble path by unexpected favour—unelated by the notice of her superior—content to take up, even for life, her abode in the humble "lodging" of Naomi, Ruth became, beneath the powerful teaching of adversity, eminently fitted for the prosperous lot to which her virtues were ere long to raise her ; and earned by "patient continuance in well-doing," her title to that dis-

tinguished place in the history of Israel and genealogy of Christ, which we shall hereafter find her to enjoy.

In the mean time, I know not a piece of scripture biography (extensive as is that fertile field) from which a young female may derive more practical, as well as pleasing instruction. Compared with the heroism, the devotion, the disinterestedness of this Moabitish damsel, how cold, how selfish, how worldly is the conduct of many a Christian daughter; even to that mother who possesses over her heart the far stronger claims of natural affection, identity of country, and the thousand cares and solitudes which none but a *real* mother knows !

When you see, as alas ! you may do, unfeeling butterflies, deserting, for the frivolities of gaiety, the lonely hearth, nay, even the lingering sick-bed of a declining parent, think of Ruth ; who, when Orpah turned from Naomi with the worldling's hollow kiss of idle endearment, *clave to her*, " through evil report, and good report," in life, and in death !

When, at the command of fashion or curiosity, you see daughters of our true and spiritual church forsaking her pure worship and decent solemnity for the dazzling ritual of the aliens among whom they have chosen to sojourn, think of Ruth ; who

undervalued and left even country and kindred, for the superior benefit of adherence to the God of Naomi ; though (unlike you) she knew him but in part, and saw but through the dark veil of the Jewish dispensation, a glimmering of his works and ways.

Above all, if tempted to purchase ease and competence by any sacrifice either of principle or rectitude, think of Ruth, who (like the great apostle who has recorded her) "laboured with her hands to be chargeable to no man;" and not for herself only, but for the indigent and helpless, whom God had cast upon her care! Perhaps there is not throughout the whole range of Scripture a character which, after contemplating it in its various features of piety, of disinterestedness, of diligence, and of filial obedience, we can so confidently sum up, and commend to the female reader, by the emphatic injunction, "Go thou, and do likewise."

MORNING EIGHTEENTH.

LESSON.—Ruth, Chapters iii. and iv.

MAMA. This morning's reading commences with a pleasing display of the tenderness and gratitude experienced by Naomi, in return for the filial kindness and devotion of Ruth. The privations which these had entailed on her beloved daughter, and the solitude and destitution to which her own advanced age would, at no distant period, consign her, seem to have pressed heavily on the affectionate heart of Naomi; and it is no wonder that she sought to obviate them by insuring for her once more repose and prosperity, under the protection of a wealthy husband. The method employed for this purpose, however repugnant to our more fastidious ideas, was perfectly consonant not only to the customs, but positive institutions, of the age and country; nor must we allow its inconsistency with our own to cast a shadow of suspicion over the fair reputation of Ruth. What was the line of conduct dictated to her by Naomi?

MARY. Mama, I am glad you have told me it was not wrong ; it seems so very odd.

MAMA. Yes, without a due knowledge of the manners and habits of the country and period, it might infer in the mother who commanded, and the daughter who obeyed, a degree of forwardness and levity, from which both were, in thought and action, equally free. But, setting aside the venerable age, near relationship, and truly paternal conduct towards Ruth, of the person on whose notice she was thus apparently obtruded—the whole proceeding, we must recollect, was viewed by all in the light of a mere legal challenge to the performance of a legal obligation, which (if proved to be indeed the next of kin of the deceased Elimelech) Boaz was too good a man to dream of declining ; so that Ruth was already, in the eye of the law, his destined wife. If we take into the account also the public and primitive scene of this seeming intrusion, viz. an open thrashing-floor, where the patriarch lay down (probably among his labourers) to guard himself his heaps of winnowed corn ; and that the people in eastern countries repose under a simple mat, seldom parting with any of their garments except their slippers—much of the apparent indecorum of the conduct we so much wonder at, will disappear, even in our eyes. That so far from being questionable in

those of Boaz, it excited in him only the most grateful approbation, is evident from his pious salutation of "Blessed be thou of the Lord my daughter;" while his unshaken respect and esteem are proved by the emphatic addition, "for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman."

MARY. How did Boaz know what it was that Ruth "required of him" to do?

MAMA. Two particulars in her address would make it perfectly evident to a Jew of those, or indeed our own, days. The expression to "spread his skirt" (or rather "wing") over his handmaiden, distinctly signified to espouse her; in token of which, in all Jewish marriages, the bridegroom still throws over the head of the bride the skirt of his wedding-garment. But besides this, Ruth, by calling Boaz his "near kinsman," or (as we said before) "*redeemer*," specially summoned him to fulfil that office, by marrying, according to law, the widow of his deceased relative. That this was perfectly understood by Boaz, is evident, both from his gratitude for her preference of a dutiful union with him to a more suitable connexion in point of age; and by his prudent expedient at once to fulfil the law by offering the right of redemption to him to whom it really belonged,

and at the same time to secure to himself so rich a treasure of virtue and worth.

How, in the mean time, did he manifest his fatherly solicitude to avert from his future wife the slightest breath of suspicion?

MARY. By making her get up before there was light to know any one by.

MAMA. Yes, according to that precept of the apostle, by which we are commanded to avoid even "the appearance of evil." And how did he testify his gratitude for the share in his approaching happiness borne by Naomi?

MARY. By filling Ruth's veil with barley, to take home to her. Mama! I wonder he did not rather give her wheat?

MAMA. Not to mention that wheat and barley harvests being at quite different seasons in Judea, the latter only was probably at his disposal,— "barley cakes" are mentioned all through the Bible as the prevailing food of its inhabitants. Can you remember any instances?

MARY. Oh! yes, it was a "barley-cake" which a man dreamt had rolled, in Gideon's time (and that you said yesterday was the same as Ruth's) into the camp of Midian. And let me see, it was five "barley-loaves" with which our Lord fed the five thousand people in the wilderness. So I need

not have wondered at Boaz sending it to poor Naomi.

MAMA. And with what grateful exultation must Ruth have displayed, and Naomi viewed, the seasonable supply of food; not only as the meed of her daughter's obedience and good conduct, but as the earnest of future plenty and prosperity. Was she justified in her shrewd guess that Boaz would urge to a speedy conclusion a matter in which his heart was now so deeply interested?

MARY. Oh yes; he went that very day, as she supposed. But why did he go and sit "in the gate?"

MAMA. As the usual place in those primitive times, both for the administration of justice, and the transaction of all legal affairs between man and man. Of this we have innumerable instances in Scripture, even so late as David, (the great-grandson of Ruth), and thence the figurative expression, (so frequent in the Bible), of "possessing the gate of their enemies," became equivalent to "having dominion over them."

Whom did Boaz summon as witnesses, in the solemn transaction between him and the still nearer kinsman of Ruth?

MARY. The elders of the city. This shewed he did not wish to do unfairly; though, I dare-

say, he was in a sad fright lest the man should choose to marry her himself. But had poor Naschi *really* land to sell? or did Boaz only say so, to try what he would do?

MAMA. We have no reason to suppose that any portion of the property of her deceased husband had indeed been restored to her; but if, as is probable, her claim over it remained, Boaz was justified in availing himself of the circumstance to draw from the nearest of kin, that distinct recognition of his right as such, which would give validity to his subsequent renunciation of it, when clogged with the condition of marrying the widow. Do you understand why *this* was declined by one, who was quite ready, on other terms, to have "redeemed" (that is "purchased") the land?

MARY. No Mama; why should his getting more land "mar the inheritance" he had already?

MAMA. It is rather of that of his children he is speaking; for the Chaldee interpreters of the passage explain it, that he had a wife already, and did not choose, by taking another, to risk introducing discord into his house, or injuring the interests of his existing family.

MARY. How strange a custom it was for people among the Jews to make bargains by giving each other their shoe!

MAMA. Not if the transaction, as here, related

to *land*; the full right to tread or enter upon which, was very appropriately signified by handing over the present possessor's shoe. The Jews in later times have adopted, first a glove, and since then, a handkerchief for the same purpose of resignation and ratification.

MARY. Mama—how could Boaz take the people to witness that he had bought all her husband's and sons' land from Naomi, when she had not enough to keep her and Ruth from starving?

MAMA. This expression confirms our conjecture, that the *right* over them still resided in her, (or rather Ruth); though long absence and want of a protector had prevented the prosecution of a claim which, in the powerful hands of Boaz, would be easily and promptly enforced. But was it with purely selfish views that this good man contemplated the possession of Ruth and recovery of her property.

MARY. Oh! no; it was "to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from his brethren." Did this mean that Ruth's children would be looked upon as her late husband's?

MAMA. In so far as succeeding to his name and property they certainly would; and this was the very reason why a wicked ancestor of Boaz incurred God's displeasure by declining to marry his

brother's widow, according to the Mosaic law; and why, buying with money that might have been theirs, the land of Elimelech, which they could never succeed to—would have “marred the inheritance” of the first family of Ruth's nearest kinsman.

In what terms did the surrounding assembly ratify and approve the resolution of Boaz?

MARY. “The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel, and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel; and be thou famous in Beth-lehem.”

MAMA. Are you aware in how remarkable a manner (far beyond the limited views of its original utterers) this benediction was fulfilled in the family and seed of Ruth?

MARY. I see below, and you have told me, that her son Obed was grandfather to King David; that would make his family “famous in Israel.”

MAMA. Have I not also told you, that a greater than even David (who, though his “father according to the flesh,” was proud to call him “Lord,”) conferred by his birth there, immortal renown on Beth-lehem Ephratah, “little among the thousands of Judah?” And that, as Rachel and Leah built up, by their progeny, the literal “house of Israel,” so did Ruth, through that illustrious “seed,” in

whom "all the nations of the earth" were to be blessed, build up to the remotest generations the Church of Christ, the "true Israel of God!" It is from this circumstance that the history of Ruth derives in our eyes its liveliest interest; and while respect for her, as the ancestress of David, dictated the careful enumeration of her descendants with which the book closes, the Christian beholds in it a valuable link in the yet more precious genealogy of Christ. It has been thought by many, that by the occurrence among the direct ancestry of our Lord, of two Gentile women, the faithful Rahab and dutiful Ruth—was dimly shadowed forth the universality of that kingdom in which "there is no respect of persons," and in which the "wall of partition" between Jew and Gentile was for ever to be "broken down."

But we have yet some affecting particulars to notice regarding that precious child, whose far more illustrious "son according to the flesh," the bystanders at his birth unconsciously celebrated. Little did they dream, when exclaiming to the joyful mother of Ruth, "Blessed be the Lord which hath not left thee this day without a '*Redeemer*' whose name shall be famous," of the fulfilment of these words in the redemption of mankind by the lineal descendant of Obed! Or, how

emphatically "better indeed than seven sons," was the daughter, selected as the ancestress of such an illustrious "seed!"

But, confining ourselves at present to the literal sense of the strong expression—could any thing exceed the gratified affection and maternal pride of Naomi, while folding to her long desolate bosom the offspring of her beloved kith? Well might she behold in this child of promise, the "restorer of her life, and nourisher of her old age;" in whose smile she lived again, and who, (under the tuition of such a parent as Ruth), could not fail to emulate her in dutiful tenderness to a grandmother's declining years.

And now, Mary, let us turn to Ruth herself, and ask, if it was not indeed "well with her," and if the "rest" Naomi's solicitude sought for her, was not indeed found? A lot of unexpected and unexampled prosperity was henceforth her's; and her's, remember, for *following after* and *trusting in the Lord*; for cleaving to, and fulfilling her appointed line of duty.

About Orpah and her fate we know and care nothing. She was of those "who mind earthly things," and are dead even while they yet live; and her memory has perished in the unrecorded fall of the idolaters among whom it was her choice to "abide." If ever, in that not distant land, tidings of Ruth's

merited elevation reached her—envy and fruitless regret might embitter even her worldly portion. But how far more different still will be their place in the world that is to come ; when “ many ” (like Ruth) “ shall have come from the east and the west, and the north and south, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God ! ”

MORNING NINETEENTH.

LESSON.—1 Samuel, Chapters i. and ii.

MARY. Mama, I am very glad we are to read the whole history of Samuel; for though I have long known about him as a child, I don't remember him so well as a Judge and Prophet, and I believe he was both.

MAMA. He was; and it is chiefly with a view to trace to its conclusion in his person, the government by divinely appointed Judges, of the Children of Israel—that I have included in our present course of reading, part of the first of the two books, of which this eminent man was the avowed author. That he also wrote that of Judges we have already mentioned as probable; nor is it unlikely that for the beautiful pathos and simplicity of the story of Ruth, we are also indebted to his pen; in those latter years of his life, when the divine selection of the family of David, and his anointment by the hand of Samuel to the future sovereignty over God's people, had elevated into public importance the history of his ancestry,

and genealogy of his immediate forefathers. The similarity of style and subject between the book we have just finished, and the earlier part of that on which we are entering, favour the supposition that the same servant of God who has borne in the latter his filial tribute to the virtues of his own pious parent, was the recorder in the former of the kindred conduct, and sentiments of Ruth. And great are the obligations of female readers of the Bible to one, who has rescued from oblivion, and held up for their instruction and imitation, a daughter and a mother to whom generations yet unborn may look for examples of filial and maternal duty.

Who was the husband of the highly favoured, though for a time depressed and desponding Hannah?

MARY. A man named Elkanah; and (like Eli-melech) he was an Ephrathite, which means, I think, that he lived in the country of Bethlehem.

MAMA. Yes; and the genealogy here assigned him has shewn (from comparison with other parts of Scripture) that he was of the *tribe of Levi*; a circumstance which, though apparently unimportant, invested his child with that legal qualification for ministering before the Lord, which was seldom, in the Old Testament times, dispensed with.

MARY. The two wives of Elkanah were just

like Leah and Rachel. The one he loved best had no children, and the other "provoked her" about it.

MAMA. Yes, Mary, in both households, domestic discord and discomfort arose as usual, from a plurality of wives; and from the partialities perhaps inseparable from human nature. But did predilection for Hannah make Elkanah unjust or unkind to Peninnah and her family?

MARY. Oh! no; he gave them all "portions;" but to Hannah he gave a 'worthy portion because he loved her.'

MAMA. Are you aware of what nature was the distribution here noticed, and which you probably suppose to relate to the worldly goods of Elkanah; in which latter case it might have been unjust, as well as unequal? It was simply (like the *fourfold* "mess" sent by Joseph to his darling Benjamin), a larger allotment of the share which every devout Jew's family when worshipping at Shiloh, received back for their own use from the animals offered by him in sacrifice; and by liberality in which (as the wives of a household lived each apart from the other), Elkanah testified, notwithstanding her want of children, his superior regard for Hannah.

In what tender and consolatory terms does he farther seek to reconcile her to a disappointment

which, as a member of so pious a family, she must have known and acknowledged to be "from the Lord?"

MARY. "Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not, and why is thy heart grieved? Am not I better to thee than ten sons?" Mama, this is almost the same expression as Ruth, being "better than seven sons" to Naomi!

MAMA. And one of peculiar force in a country and times when the possession of children ("sons" especially) was esteemed above every earthly blessing; and where the absence of them could mar, as in the case before us, the most enviable human lot. But mark the difference in conduct under this affliction, between Hannah, the enlightened worshipper of the true God, and that Rachel to whom you lately compared her; and who, (even after her long union with the devout Jacob), could secrete in her tent and *heart* the "images" of her father's household idolatry! "Give me children or I die!" is the querulous exclamation of the latter; addressed to that fellow mortal, whose indignant reply of, "Am I in God's stead?" was her folly's proper and merited rebuke. But what, in similar "bitterness of soul," was the resource of Hannah?

MARY. Oh! she prayed unto the Lord, and vowed a vow, and promised if He would "re-

member her," and give her a child, to dedicate him to God all the days of his life. And "no razor was to come upon his head." Would that make him strong, like Samson?

MAMA. I thought we had understood that the hair of Samson had nothing to do with his strength, farther than as its loss or possession denoted the breach or renewal of his covenant with God. It was to mark the dedication to "holiness" of her unborn babe, that Hannah proposed to make him a "Nazarite before the Lord." Have you ever considered how great a sacrifice the overflowing of a grateful heart here dictated to one, destined, we are sure, if ever there was such, to be a doating parent? Levites in general were not required to join the service of the temple until 25 years of age, nor to continue in it after 50; but "all the days of his life," was Hannah content to resign the society of her first, perhaps her only son, in requital of the goodness which should grant her a "man-child," and "take away her reproach."

But to what misconstruction did the passionate fervour of her silent supplication expose her, in the opinion of Eli, the High Priest?

MARY. I am almost ashamed to mention such a thing of a woman: he thought she had drunk too much! How could this have happened in the

very temple of God, and in the time of a solemn sacrifice?

MAMA. Alas! Mary, the shameless excesses within the precincts of the sanctuary, of Eli's own profligate sons, would make him too easily suspicious of others! And those very family repasts which we have elsewhere mentioned, as terminating the public ceremonies, and giving a character of social cheerfulness to the festivals of the Jews, were perhaps but too liable to abuses, from which even the Lord's Supper, among the early Christians, was, we learn with shame, not wholly free. But how firmly, though mildly, does Hannah repel a charge, applicable only, as she truly says, to a "*daughter of Belial*;" and which it were well if the unhappy women who, in our latter days, disgrace by it both their sex and profession, would see in the same odious light! And how gladly does she depart, with a countenance no longer "sad," when the prayer of her heart has been ratified by the powerful benediction of the venerable servant of God! And how fervent would be her part in that early "worship of the Lord," with which the homeward journey of the pious household was sanctified!

Is there any thing that strikes you as singular, in the way of contrast, between the rejoicing which soon took place at Ramah, on the birth of the infant

Samuel, and a widely differing scene of bereavement and desolation, predicted to take place then in the Old Testament, and realized in the New ?

MARY. Let me think. Does it not say, about the murder of the innocents by Herod, " In Ramah was there a voice heard, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted because they are not ?" But I thought *they* were killed at Bethlehem.

MAMA. You forget the addition, " and in all the *coasts thereof*," which probably included that one of the many Ramahs mentioned in Scripture, which was the residence of the Bethlehemite Elkanah.

But what was the name conferred on her child by the delighted Hannah ?

MARY. Samuel ; what does that signify ?

MAMA. " Asked of the Lord ;" thereby perpetuating the memory of his being indeed the answer to prayer ; an acknowledgment, we are led to suppose, also made by his grateful father, when, (in addition to his usual yearly sacrifice), it is said he offered to the Lord his " vow."

MARY. I wonder, Mama, that Hannah did not wish to go too, and thank God in his holy temple, and show her child to good Eli.

MAMA. That such would have been her inclination, we cannot doubt ; but you forget the slei

der facilities then afforded for women in journeying, and the wise provision in the law of Moses, by which, while their attendance at the yearly festivals was permitted and approved, it was not, like that of the "males," obligatory, but dispensed with when encumbered with young children. It was from no deficiency of zeal or gratitude that Hannah tarried in Ramah, while others went to worship at Shiloh. It was only to fit, by careful nursing, her beloved Samuel for early devotion to his God; and to fortify her own heart for the one painful effort which was to transfer him for ever from her arms and bosom, to the sanctuary of the Lord.

MARY. Surely even when "weaned" he would be too young to do without his mother.

MAMA. No doubt he was still so, as is expressly said in verse 24th. But the habits of the East extend, far beyond our own, the period of nursing; nor is it uncommon in southern countries, for children still so nourished, to be running about alone. That maternal tenderness would, in Samuel's case, prolong to the uttermost the pleasing task, we may well believe; but when, at length, it was completed, do we find Hannah shrinking from the fulfilment of the yet higher duty she had voluntarily bound herself to discharge?

MARY. No, she boldly took the dear child up

with her, "to bring him to the Lord, in Shiloh."

MAMA. And did this "free-will offering," all precious as it was, seem sufficient in her eyes to supersede every other?

MARY. No, no; she took besides, "three bullocks, and an ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine." I suppose this last meant a good quantity, in a large skin, does it not?

MAMA. Probably; from the liberality of the rest of the intended offering.

But how amply must she have been repaid, both for it and the yet more costly sacrifice she made in "not withholding her son, her only son, whom she loved, from the Lord"—when standing before His altar, she could say to his sympathising priest, "As thy soul liveth, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition. Therefore also have I "*lent*," or (as it should rather be translated), "*returned*" him to the Lord."

MARY. Mama! Is Samuel meant when it says, "*he worshipped the Lord there*?" Was he not too young to do so?

MAMA. Even were there any other person to whom the words could be applied, we should feel assured (from the deep piety of Hannah), that to

present and initiate her son as an infant worshipper in the sanctuary of her God, would be her care and pride before leaving Shiloh. But as, very shortly after her departure, he is represented as "ministering before the Lord, clad in a *linen ephod*," (or sacerdotal garment), we may conclude that, even when no longer dependent on her for mere bodily nutriment, she had retained her child till the spiritual nurture, so peculiarly a mother's province, had been in some degree administered. Indeed, had his youthful mind not been previously imbued at home with the fear and love of God, Samuel could hardly have either imbibed or cherished, amid the depravity of the household of Eli, the purity of heart, and docility of disposition, by which he was recommended at so early an age, to the special favour and revelations of the Lord. Well would it be for all children, if the nourishment derived from the maternal bosom were thus early blended with spiritual food; and if the "weaning" which reluctantly divorces them from thence, were followed up by the yet more painful but necessary effort, of denying them every indulgence inconsistent with their welfare and salvation!

But we must hasten to the inspired "Song," in which the thanksgivings of Hannah were poured

out before the Lord. Is there any similar hymn in Scripture of which it forcibly reminds you?

MARY. Oh! it is almost the same as that of the mother of the Saviour, beginning, "My soul shall magnify the Lord," &c.

MAMA. Yes; in exulting gratitude for the goodness of God—in triumphant celebration of his mighty power and "wonderful works among the children of men"—these inspired effusions breathe a truly kindred spirit. But while a deep sense of personal humility (proportioned to the magnitude of the honour to be conferred on her) specially characterizes the hymn of Mary, that of Hannah abounds in prophetic references; not only to her own future fertility, and the victorious character of her son's administration, but to the glory of that "far greater" King, the "anointed of the Lord," whom she enjoys the honour of being the first distinctly to name and point out. A triumphant "seed of the woman" had indeed been promised even to sinning Eve—and a "prophet like unto himself," had Moses predicted would arise in due time among his brethren. But in his character of an "anointed king," no one had before Hannah been privileged to speak of Christ; not merely (like Abraham) to "see his day afar off and be glad," but communicate the glad tidings to generations unborn; for to "Messiah" is the hymn of

Hannah applied, even by the unbelieving Jews themselves. Ought not this distinction, Mary, conferred by the Spirit of God on a pious female, to enhance our value for that fervent piety which formed her only qualification for the prophetic office? And should not the examples we have lately reviewed of virtue in "holy women of old," excite in us a laudable emulation, and a fear lest, even as Christians, we should "come short" of so lofty a standard? No human accomplishments, let us remember, fitted the gleaner of Moab to be a "mother of princes in Israel;" or the wife of the humble Levite of Ramah to deliver the "oracles of God." Devotion to His service, resignation to his will, and gratitude for his benefits, constituted then as now (along with the "meek and quiet spirit" which ought ever to accompany them) the chief glory and ornament of our sex.

MARY. Mama, what does Hannah mean when she says her "horn" was exalted; and that God should "exalt the horn of His anointed?"

MAMA. This very common Scripture phrase has derived much illustration from the singular custom discovered by modern travellers still to prevail in Abyssinia, where many Jewish practices are said to have been introduced by the intercourse of their famous Queen with Solomon.

Governors of provinces in that country were found by Bruce to wear round the head a broad fillet; in the centre of which rose a piece of silver gilt, about four inches long, not only exactly resembling, but called by themselves a "horn," and only worn in parades or reviews after victory; thereby elucidating in a wonderful manner the phrase of "exalting" or "lifting up" the "horn."

But we must hurry over the accounts given in the latter part of our reading, of the shamefully rapacious conduct of the sons of poor old Eli. Not content with superadding to the regular Mosaic canon (which provided amply out of the sacrifices for the support of the priests) the most arbitrary exactions, by which they disgusted and alienated the people from the service of God—they defiled His very sanctuary with scandalous sins, for which they were in vain reproved by their too indulgent and now infirm parent. By what fearful denunciation was he in his turn rebuked, for the sin (unpardonable alike in a father and a priest) of "honouring his sons above his God?"

MARY. His sons were to die young, both in one day, and they were to "consume his eyes and grieve his heart; and there was not to be a old man in his house for ever."

MAMA. And by what other humiliating particulars (already predicted in these words of Hē

nah, "he that is full shall hire himself for bread"—was the degradation of this "rejected" family to be completed?

MARY. "Every one that is left in thine house shall come and crouch for a morsel of bread, and shall say 'Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priest's offices, that I may eat a piece bread.'"

MAMA. Yes, Mary; such was the sentence of rejection and abandonment "gone out from before the Lord" against that most iniquitous of all classes of offenders—shameless profaners of the priesthood! To all such it holds out a terrible warning; nor can parents connive like Eli, at the wickedness of their children, without expecting to partake, in this world, of Eli's grief and mortification, and in the world to come of the stings of that remorse, which will eternally upbraid them with the misery and ruin of their offspring.

MORNING TWENTIETH.

Lesson.—1 Samuel, Chapters iii. and iv.

MAMA. If we had occasion to acknowledge yesterday, with pious gratitude and humility, the honour conferred on our sex by that prophetic view of a future Saviour which rewarded the piety of Hannah, we have in to-day's reading a still more astonishing proof that the "Lord seeth not as man seeth;" and that in those spiritual things especially which belong to Him, wisdom is not always vouchsafed to men of understanding. While the investment of Samuel, almost in infancy, with the office of a prophet and reprovcr of God's anointed priest, sufficiently testifies, that, in the choice of his instruments, purity of heart and unhesitating obedience can compensate the want of all more ambitious qualifications; young people may draw from the early piety and docility thus signally distinguished, both the brightest example and highest encouragement. Christian children

will, it is true, neither expect to be favoured (in these times of general illumination) with a special revelation from Heaven; nor will they arrogate to themselves the character, so long modestly declined, and at length so reluctantly assumed by Samuel, of a reprover of elder persons. But, Mary, many are the silent calls of God's Holy Spirit, to which, from the depths of a pious heart, they may daily answer, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth;" and many are the occasions on which the youngest among them may tacitly reprove, by their own steadiness in the right path, the follies or vices of their youthful associates. And let those who (like Samuel) have enjoyed the inestimable benefit of a mother's teaching and a mother's prayers, remember that if *he* would have been peculiarly unpardonable had he turned a deaf ear to the repeated summons of God—no less unpardonable will they be, if, "refusing the voice that now speaketh to them from heaven," they grow up partakers in the sins, and sharers in the doom, of the profligate or the careless.

By what circumstance was the prophetic honour conferred on Samuel, in the beginning of our chapter, peculiarly enhanced?

MARY. By the scarcity of God's word in those days. It says "there was no open vision"—what does that mean?

MAMA. That since the one vouchsafed to Man-
noah seventy years before, we read of no visible
manifestation of the presence of Jehovah among
the children of Israel ; while, to the absence of
such among a gross and carnal people, may per-
haps in part be traced that degeneracy of the
very servants of the altar, of which the continued
silence of an offended God was the just' punish-
ment.

How was the long silence at length awfully
broken ?

MARY. By God calling to Samuel when he
was lying asleep in the temple. I thought there
was no temple till long after this time.

MAMA. You are right, the tabernacle is here
meant, which (especially from the time of its be-
ing permanently erected at Shiloh) is frequently
thus called in Scripture.

MARY. But though you explained to me (when
reading about little King Joash being brought up
in the temple) that there were houses within it
for the priests' families, I don't quite know how
the tabernacle, which you told me was only a large
tent, came to be slept in by Eli and Samuel ?

MAMA. Though constructed on the principle
of a tent, for the convenience of frequent removals
in the wilderness, the tabernacle comprised, be-
sides its grand divisions of " outer sanctuary" and

“holy of holies,” various courts, within whose precincts sacrifice was offered, and which afforded lodging to the immediate ministers of the altar, among whom we have seen Samuel was now expressly enrolled.

There is something very beautiful, as well as deeply instructive, in thus viewing the old age of Eli, and the childhood of Samuel, alike reposing under the shadow of the same sacred walls, and the protection of that God, whose voice the one was about, for the first time, with pious awe to hear, and whose judgments the other was ere long, for the last time, with pious resignation, to have announced to him.

Whose call did Samuel two several times in dutiful alacrity fly to answer?

MARY. Eli's; which was very natural, for a child could never think God would speak to *him*.

MAMA. But all children may learn from the example of Samuel, how acceptable to God is that readiness of filial obedience which he manifested towards one who stood to him in the place of an earthly parent. How different from the cold reluctant assent yielded to parental commands by hundreds, like the careless son in the New Testament, who said, “I go, sir, and went not”—is the starting up from the sweet sleep of youth and health of Samuel; his repeated and anxious as-

surances of "Here I am, for thou *didst* call me;" his mortification at being denied, as he thought, the privilege of serving and pleasing his aged benefactor! This, this it was which the Lord approved in Samuel, and which fitted him (when at length made aware of the higher nature of the obedience to which he was called) to sacrifice, however reluctantly, his amiable feelings towards an earthly friend, to his duty to a Heavenly Master.

How did he, instructed by the riper experience of Eli, now answer the Divine summons?

MARY. "Speak, Lord! for thy servant heareth." Mama, he must have been dreadfully afraid when he knew at length that it was God himself who called to him.

MAMA. Awed, indeed, must so young a creature have felt, especially when we consider the terrible nature of the communication poured into his "tingling ear!" But for himself, it does not appear that this nestling, brought up in the "courts of God's house," indulged in any idle apprehensions. His only fear was for the effect of his tidings on the enfeebled frame and harassed feelings of the aged Eli. Had he shewn the same willingness to hurt and distress, as he had lately done to serve and please his old friend, we should have been disposed to hate instead of loving him.

What was the nature of the doom pronounced on Eli ?

MARY. His house was to be “judged, and made an end of,” and its iniquity was “not to be purged with sacrifice or offering, for ever.”

MAMA. And why was this denunciation made so fearfully irrevocable ?

MARY. For the iniquity which Eli *knew of*—because “his sons made themselves vile, and he *restrained them not.*”

MAMA. Yes, Mary ; the most impressive lesson ever read in Scripture to thoughtless parents, resides in these awful words. Had Eli enforced, by wholesome restraint, the example of virtue he contented himself with setting before his children, not only would the commission of the enormities by which they polluted God’s altar, and provoked His vengeance, have been rendered impossible, but the very seeds of vice to which these owed their origin would have been early stifled ; and in all probability, instead of being a “reproach and a byword,” beggars and suppliants for a “piece of bread,” the family of Eli, (like that of his faithful successor), would “not have wanted a man to stand before the Lord” as long as a kingdom and temple existed in Israel ! And if it is heart-rending to a parent to have to answer, and justly, for the temporal ruin of his children—who shall

even guess at the bitterness of the remorse of those who have helped to rob their injured offspring of their place in that world where they were called to be "priests and kings before God for ever."

How was the amiable reluctance of Samuel to afflict Eli with these evil tidings at length overcome?

MARY. Eli first spoke to him kindly, and called him "my son;" and then ordered him not to hide any thing from him of what the Lord had said. It would not have been like Samuel to refuse *then*.

MAMA. No; the very same dutiful spirit which at first made him silent, dictated obedience now; especially when enforced in the name of that God who had so recently enrolled him in his own immediate service. Did this kind and affectionate child now soften or keep back any part of the Divine denunciation?

MARY. No, no; he would not have dared; for he must have known that God could read the heart, and was the best judge of His own message.

MAMA. It would be well if all, who at riper years, and with more matured experience, have undertaken to deliver its sacred tenor, were equally careful to preserve it unadulterated; and would remember the word of an inspired Apostle, "Woe is laid on me if I preach not the Gospel."

But we must return to the effect of Samuel's faithful testimony on the aged Eli. In what spirit did he receive the merited chastening of the Lord ?

MARY. One cannot help being very sorry for him, he was so mild and resigned. I did not know it was *his* saying one so often hears quoted by pious people in affliction—"It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth Him good."

MAMA. Yes ; and this expression of humble resignation is so much the more affecting, because (as we shall shortly see), it did not proceed from feelings blunted by age, but simply from a deep sense of error in himself, and acquiescence in the just judgment of God.

But, before proceeding to the melancholy catastrophe of the next chapter, what distinction do we find awaiting the early piety, and fearless obedience of Samuel ?

MARY. "He grew, and the Lord was with him ; and all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord." Mama, this was a great honour for so young a boy !

MAMA. It was, indeed, Mary ! and if (as I before remarked) our reading yesterday led us to speak of "women highly favoured of the Lord," similar honour is to-day reflected on the young,

by the revelation of the "Word of God" to the child Samuel in Shiloh. But if even we, at this distance of years, can sympathise in the glorious distinction, what must have been the exulting feelings of the pious Hannah, when permitted to see the son she had devoted to the service of God, the chosen depositary of his will; and instead of an obscure Levite of Ramah, an object of reverential observance to the "many thousands of Israel!" So often do sacrifices made to a sense of duty find, even in this world, their "exceeding great reward!"

But we must hasten to the far different and more humiliating scenes recorded in our second chapter. Against whom do we find the Israelites "going out to battle?"

MARY. The Philistines, Mama; and they must surely have gone without asking Samuel, for they were miserably "smitten before them."

MAMA. Yes, we may be assured of this omission (unpardonable now, when a prophet had again been vouchsafed them) by the circumstance of their madly taking upon them to remove the ark from Shiloh; a profanation of which Samuel, young as he was, could have testified the folly as well as sinfulness.

MARY. I suppose they did it because Joshua made the ark be carried round Jericho; but then

God commanded it, and now they had no right to move it from the place where He had chosen it to remain. It did them no good, however, except frightening the Philistines.

MAMA. No, and like all other unauthorized invasions of the prerogative of God, it gave occasion (by the failure of a mere human expedient, devised by rashness and presumption) for His "enemies to blaspheme." It might be natural for *them* (with their childish pagan notions of tutelary and local deities,) to despair of success, *now* that the "God of Israel" was *come* into the opposite camp. But for those who knew (or might have known) that He "whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain," was best invoked in the "place He had chosen to put His name there;" it was a just punishment to find that His insulted Glory was content, by a momentary eclipse in the eyes of ignorant heathens, to vindicate itself from the affront offered by His own pretended worshippers.

What was the dreadful blow inflicted for this purpose on the national pride, and mistaken "will worship" of the Israelites?

MARY. "The ark of God was *taken*!" Mama, I wonder He could allow this!

MAMA. And I should have wondered how it could be otherwise, consistently with that Ma-

jesty which, (by dragging, as it were, the Almighty into the field), the people had impiously striven to pledge to their unsanctioned enterprize. Better was it in His eyes, that an "uncircumcised Philistine" should enjoy a temporary triumph, than that, emboldened by success, His chosen people should have continued to make the ark of the Lord subservient to their unhallowed caprices.

But on which of the guilty copartners in the act of sacrilege, do we find special vengeance to have fallen?

MARY. On Hophni and Phineas, Eli's sons, who were along with the ark in the camp; and who ought to have known better, and staid at Shiloh.

MAMA. And on whom rested, in all probability, the chief guilt of being accessory to its removal; as the intense anxiety for its fate, of their aged powerless parent sufficiently testified his reluctant compliance. For whom were his misgivings awakened, on first hearing the cry of distress that arose on the arrival of the messenger of mourning? Was it for his indulged and too dearly beloved sons?

MARY. Oh! no; it was for the ark of God. And when he heard *it* was taken, the poor old man, of ninety-eight, fell off his seat backward and died!

MAMA. Yes, Mary, under the influence of that deepest of all remorse which can visit the pious bosom ; when he beheld not only the welfare of his own family, but the honour of that ark of God, entrusted to his special ministry, endangered by the effects of his own criminal connivance. Without the most grievous dereliction of his duty as a parent, and a High Priest, his sons could never have carried so far their usurped authority as to place in jeopardy the "oracles of God." Nor would He, for aught less than the signal chastisement of all concerned, have suffered, even for a moment, the heathen to triumph, and the ark of His "Testimony" to fall into their hands. No wonder that so awful and unheard of a misfortune swallowed up, even in the heart of a parent, the loss of his two sons !


But what were its effects on one whom their decease must have touched yet more nearly and tenderly ?

MARY. It made the wife of Phineas, when she was dying, call her son "Ichabod," because the glory was "departed" from Israel ;" and even she seems to have thought much more of the taking of the ark, than of the deaths of her husband and father-in-law.

MAMA. Yes, to a dying woman these events would appear in their true dimensions and real

colours. Nor could even the birth of a son, by which the loss of his father might be compensated, shed a ray of joy over a deathbed, embittered by the knowledge that the God to whose service his birth would naturally have devoted him, had been alienated from His people by his parents' treachery and misconduct. And let us close this humiliating record of Israel's disgrace and discomfiture, by an instructive review of the train of misfortunes attributable to the weak infatuation of Eli.

First, the disgust and alienation occasioned among God's people by the tyranny and profligacy of his sons ; the weight of personal guilt incurred by these misguided youths themselves ; the transfer of the priesthood from their race to another family ; the betraying of the ark by their connivance into the hands of the Philistines ; their own untimely and merited deaths ; and the shock which snapped in so cruel a manner the fragile thread of their old father's existence, and the tender ties which bound to life the wife of their bosom. All these disastrous consequences may be distinctly traced to the culpable negligence of Eli ; and let none by whom the fatal train is followed up, hesitate to subscribe to the advice of the " wise man," " Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying ; for a foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him."



MORNING TWENTY-FIRST.

LESSON—1 Samuel, Chapters v. and vi.

MAMA. I think, Mary, that the memorable chapters we have just read must have gone far to remove the not unnatural surprise and concern you expressed yesterday on the ark of the Lord being suffered to fall into the hands of the Philistines. If, impressing these proud idolaters with lofty conceptions of the power of the God they habitually defied, had been (as we saw it was not) the sole object of the momentary triumph accorded them, we should now have become convinced that it was better attained by that triumph than by the most signal victory of the Israelites ; so that, had the punishment of the latter been wholly out of the question, the vindication of Jehovah's honour was effectually secured.

It is probable that the ignorant heathens, whose panic at the arrival of the ark in the camp of Israel arose from some superstitious belief in its efficacy as a charm or symbol—hoped, by its cap-

ture and transference to themselves, to ensure the very benefits it had failed to confer on their enemies : just as the foolish king of Israel (of whom we once read) imported and set up those very gods of Damascus who had been powerless to deliver their own worshippers from his victorious arms. There is nothing too stupid or absurd to be freely admitted by those whose understanding has once been brought to seek safety and protection from stocks and stones ; and so far from wondering, as many do, at the inconsistencies of idolaters, that word alone seems an epitome of all the folly and perversion of which the human mind is capable.

What proof does the narrative afford that the capture of the ark (the supposed tutelary deity of the Israelites) did not prevent the conquerors from still regarding it as an object of fear and worship ?

MARY. They put it into the very house of Dagon, and set it up beside him. What an insult to the true God !

MAMA. Yes, in reality ; but not thus intended, by those who were too blind to discern the difference. Do you know any particulars characteristic of this Philistine idol ?

MARY. No.

MAMA. Its name signifies a " fish," which

(with a human head and shoulders) its lower parts resembled ; a form probably adopted for their idol by a maritime people, from some superstition, not yet entirely eradicated, about mermen, or supernatural beings, half-fish half-man. But is this the first time that Dagon and his worship have come under our notice ?

MARY. No, no : one would think Sampson's pulling down his temple in the strength of the God of the Jews would have made the Philistines afraid enough of Him !

MAMA. True ; and it was not superstitious fear of the God of Israel in which they were now deficient ; but that rational discernment of the Creator of the universe from the meanest workmanship of their own hands, which, at this dark period, the most signal judgments failed to communicate to the benighted mind of man. Did the prostrate and mutilated condition of their national deity at all open their eyes to the tremendous difference ?

MARY. No, they first tried to set Dagon up again ; and when all broken to pieces, instead of throwing the useless bits away, they only left off going across the threshold on which he had fallen. Why so ?

- MAMA. Because, with inconceivable stupidity, they seem to have considered the threshold hal-

lowed by the very humiliation of their prostrate divinity; and so pertinaciously did they adhere to this childish notion, that a prophet of Israel (centuries after) designates the worshippers of Dagon by the title of "those that leap on the threshold."

But was Jehovah content with a mortification which their besotted minds forbade them to comprehend?

MARY. No; "His hand was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them and smote them, with emerods, even Ashdod and the *coasts* thereof."

MAMA. This last expression confirms what we said of its being a maritime district. Ashdod (called in the New Testament Azotus) was a port between Gaza and Joppa. What the precise disease was with which God afflicted its inhabitants, learned men have not discovered; but it must have been grievous, from their anxiety to get rid of the ark, its acknowledged cause.

MARY. If they knew it was the ark that brought all the harm upon them, why did they not pray to the God it belonged to, to cure them? or send it home at once?

MAMA. Just because rational conduct is (as we before remarked), nowhere found in fellowship with gross idolatry. Those Philistines who could unhesitatingly exalt the God of even the vanquished Israelites into equality with Dagon, had

not sense (when the fellowship was indignantly spurned and the idol annihilated) to transfer to the victorious God of the Hebrews, their homage and their hearts; and, even when smarting under his continued indignation, contented themselves with shifting the evil from city to city, instead of averting it by penitence and submission. Were it not that the expedients daily resorted to among ourselves to escape the punishment of sin without turning at once to the sole "fountain opened" for its cure, partook of the same, or worse inconsistency—we might have a better right to wonder at the folly manifested by the sufferers of Ashdod.

What was the result of the removal of the ark to Gath?

MARY. Oh! the same, as might have been expected. "The hand of the Lord was against the city with a very great destruction." No wonder the people of Ekron cried out (when it came to them next), that they had brought the ark of the God of Israel, "to slay them and their people!"

MAMA. Strange! that it never occurred to any one that it might be converted by prayer and submission into an instrument of healing and safety! There is something to us very striking in seeing the visible symbol of the power of the God of Heaven and Earth, thus hunted from place to place, like an "accursed thing;" bringing death

and desolation instead of "healing under its wings;" did it not remind us of the awful, nay we might, alas! almost say hateful aspect, under which God is obstinately viewed by those who (regarding him as an enemy), still say, "We will not have the Lord to reign over us."

What natural determination did the universal calamity occasioned in the land by the presence of the ark, at length lead to?

MARY. What they ought to have done at first—to send it away to its own place.

MAMA. How long had it remained a "terror to the evil doers" of that most deeply corrupted of heathen lands?

MARY. Seven months; till all the people had either died or been very ill. I am sure they needed no priests or diviners to teach them to get rid of it.

MAMA. No; but they sent for such to instruct them how to dismiss it acceptably; one slight symptom of the salutary and humbling effects of continued affliction. They never thought, till now, of propitiating the offended God of the Israelites. How was this to be done?

MARY. Even the heathen priests advised them to send a trespass-offering, "that they might be healed, and his hand removed." This was surely acknowledging His power at least.

MAMA. Yes, as a rival, and for the present conquering deity ; but with no conversion of the understanding to His supremacy, or of the heart to His service. Thus do the “ devils believe and tremble ;” and careless professing Christians banish the God they cannot altogether deny. But what singular offering did slavish fear suggest to the humbled lords of the Philistines ?

MARY. A very strange one ! golden images of the “ emerods,” (whatever they were), that had killed so many of them ; and “ golden mice.” What could the meaning of either be ?

MAMA. Strange as the former part of the transaction may appear to you, it was not only customary among the ancients to dedicate in their temples symbols of any diseases or deliverances they had experienced, but Catholic churches are hung round to this day with votive offerings, representing frequently diseased limbs, supposed to have been miraculously restored to soundness ; while, in sea-port towns, models of ships in silver, or other materials, are suspended in gratitude for escape from shipwreck.

As for the “ mice,” besides appropriately denoting the numbers in which we are told they had “ marred the land, and consumed its fruits,” they had (as we learn from heathen authors), a peculiar sanctity ascribed to them for “ lustration,” or cleansing.

MARY. I shall never wonder at this again, now you have made it all so clear; but I never can cease wondering that the Philistine priests should talk so sensibly to their countrymen about not "hardening their hearts like Pharaoh," and remembering all God had done to *him*, and yet remain idolaters all the time themselves!

MAMA. God forbid you should cease to wonder, Mary, at the fearful want of connexion still existing in the human mind between apparent religious knowledge and real practical religion. Many can talk scripturally with their lips, nay strenuously advise others to "give glory unto the God of Israel," while their own hearts remain as far from him as those of the unconverted followers of Dagon.

But what singular mode did these soothsayers suggest for removing the doubts which yet lingered in their minds, as to the miraculous agency of the God they had been "honouring with their lips?"

MARY. If the two milch cows which had never drawn a cart before, and had their calves shut up at home, went back to them (as was quite natural), instead of going straight to Beth-shemesh, then they were to know it was "not God who smote them, but all a chance that happened unto them." Mama, they might have known there was no such *thing* as chance in the world.

MAMA. Be thankful that you know it, and still more so, that it is a God of grace and mercy, on whom depend the minutest as well as most momentous events in this world's history! But the test proposed by the diviners of Ekron, though betraying unbelief, was abundantly conclusive. Could any thing, think you, (short of Divine guidance), impel two unbroken animals, yoked together for the first time, unhesitatingly to leave their offspring behind, and ("lowing" with satisfaction "as they went" along,) to hold the placid tenor of their way along the strange "coasts" of Judea, to the unknown city of Beth-shemesh?

MARY. No, certainly. I am glad God condescended to make this so plain to the Philistine lords who followed.

MAMA. To his own honour this undoubtedly redounded, though alas! not (that we read of) to their conviction or amendment. But how was the return of the long lost national palladium hailed by the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh?

MARY. They rejoiced to see it; and I am glad the Philistine lords saw them offer a burnt-offering with the wood of the very cart, and the cows that drew it, before they returned to their own land.

MAMA. Such a suitable and grateful mode of welcoming back among them the precious symbol

which their folly had polluted, certainly spoke well for the reviving piety and penitence of those into whose hands it first came. Well would it have been for them, had the holy fear and reverence testified by their original reception of it, continued to influence them! By whose privileged hands, did you observe, was it lifted from the cart?

MARY. By the Levites: no one else, you know, was allowed by God to touch it.

MAMA. And how was neglect of this special injunction fearfully visited?

MARY. With a dreadful judgment, Mama! and one that seems terribly severe for just looking into the ark to see if all was right within it.

MAMA. We have no reason to imagine the motives of the offenders so laudable as you suppose; but even had it been so, the positive commands of God are, in no instance, to give place to the arrogant officiousness of His creatures. To the Lord did it belong to rectify and arrange whatever of disorder or dilapidation His ark might have suffered from Philistine outrage; less intolerable in His eyes than the presumptuous curiosity of his miscalled servants. The chastisement with which the latter were visited may seem, at first sight, severe; but it is by no means a solitary instance of that holy "jealousy" with which

it has pleased the Almighty to fence round, from unhallowed hands and eyes, the precincts of His sanctuary. Even Levites (the chosen ministers of the altar) were forbidden, *on pain of death*, to pry into the sacred contents of the ark: therefore those of the rabble of Bethshemesh who took upon themselves to do so, could not be said to perish unwarned. But this being premised, it may be a satisfaction to you to learn, that out of the fifty thousand persons drawn together by curiosity from Beth-shemesh and the neighbouring country, only *seventy men* are supposed to have been partakers in the sin or its punishment; the more exact translation appearing to be—"out of fifty thousand, threescore and ten men." As there is no probable ground for supposing that fifty thousand individuals could have committed the offence, so it is more consonant to the strict method of God, in avenging similar transgressions, that the offenders only should have been marked out as the victims of their sacrilege; seventy of whom, from the scanty population of a single village, would sufficiently attest the indignation, and vindicate the Majesty of Heaven. We are corroborated in this lenient interpretation by "seventy" being the number expressly mentioned by the Jew Josephus, as having perished on this memorable occasion.

But what salutary effect had even this mitigated chastisement on the Beth-shemites?

MARY. They said, "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?" But I think they were as bad as the Philistines; for, instead of keeping the ark, and reverencing it properly, they only thought of sending it away.

MAMA. Yes: as many are in the daily practice of "putting far from them" a God too holy for their taste, and too formidable for their comfort. The resource on such occasions is, alas! obvious and easy; it is that of the Bethshemites, who, because the God of Israel might not be offended with impunity, said to Him, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."

There are few passages of Scripture history, Mary, more practically instructive than the one we have this day read; descriptive of the migrations, amid ignorant enemies and pretended friends, of the abused, and undervalued, and trampled testimony of God. Among the Philistines it came "mighty in word and in power," to the "casting down" of the prostrate deities of paganism, and "making a shew of them openly." Yet, in the face of the most irresistible demonstration, it was rejected, bandied from place to place, and, finally, (though with diminished audacity), exiled from the land it might have healed and saved.

And what was its reception, even on the more favoured soil of God's own land of promise? Hailed with outward tokens of respect, and an object of temporary rejoicing, no sooner did it manifest itself as an "avenger of transgression"—as something too holy to be trifled with—than "Let us alone, what have we to do with thee," became the universal cry among a people "choosing darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil;" and content to forego (rather than be reminded of His existence), the proud distinction and inexpressible privileges conferred on a nation by the presence of that God, of whose residence among them in the same character of "Emmanuel," their guilty descendants shewed themselves yet more unworthy.

MORNING TWENTY-SECOND.

LESSON—1 Samuel, Chapters vii. and viii.

MAMA. In the two chapters which, in hastening to the termination of the Theocracy, or divine government of Israel by Judges, we have read to-day—we have the most instructive, though painful, proofs of the fallibility and inconsistency of human nature; first, in even the sons of Samuel proving obnoxious to God and man for the same enormities which had displaced from the priesthood the posterity of Eli; and, secondly, in the wayward ingratitude with which the too highly favoured Israelites threw from them the honour and privilege of direct Divine supremacy, and exclaimed, in defiance of prohibitions and warnings, “Nay, but we will have a king to reign over us!”

What apparently sincere acts of humiliation and repentance, recorded in the earlier part of our chapters, made this impious demand particularly inconsistent?

MARY. When the ark had been twenty years

at Kirjath-jearim, it says "All the house of Israel lamented after the Lord." Why did they lament now, when the ark was safe back in their own country?

MAMA. Not without reason, as the address of Samuel testifies; since, notwithstanding the long residence among them of the hallowed symbol of God's presence, it appears that "gods many, and lords many," shared as completely with Jehovah the allegiance of Israel, as Dagon had been set up in rivalry with Him by the ignorant Philistines. That the continued oppressions of the latter people were at the bottom of the generally selfish lamentations of the "house of Israel," we may gather from Samuel's assurance, that if they would "return unto the Lord with all their hearts," He would deliver them out of the hand of the Philistines. And with the view only of temporal relief, there is reason to fear the extorted reformation may have taken place. Had it been genuine, and founded on pious gratitude, it is impossible to suppose its issue would so soon after, have been dissatisfaction with God's government, and revolt against His authority.

MARY. What does it mean that the people, when gathered at Mizpeh, "drew water and poured it out before the Lord;" as well as fasted, and confessed their sins?

MAMA. Learned men are not quite agreed as to the precise nature of this symbolic action, some supposing it to refer to the purification of heart and life indispensable to sincere repentance. But the greater part imagine, that as Samuel had just promised them a signal temporal deliverance, the water was poured out in rejoicing at the prospect of it; as was the annual custom at the feast of tabernacles, when commemorating the goodness and bounty of God; to which Isaiah alludes when he says, "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation."

But do you recollect any passage in the New Testament, in which reference yet more distinct is made to the custom of drawing, and gratuitously distributing water at the conclusion of a great Jewish festival?

MARY. I don't remember any.

MAMA. Do we not read in the Gospel, that it was on the "*last day of the feast*" that our Lord stood and cried (availing himself as usual of surrounding circumstances) "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink—come, buy without money and without price"—thus indicating at once the freeness and joyful nature of the Gospel salvation; in which not water merely, (precious as it was in the parched lands of the east),

but the costlier refreshments of wine and milk are indiscriminately poured forth ?

But had all their fastings, humiliations, or even subsequent rejoicings, sufficed to inspire the Israelites with that faith in God, which, when testified by obedience, is better than " whole burnt offerings and sacrifices ?"

MARY. No ; with God and Samuel on their side, the cowardly creatures were still afraid of the Philistines.

MAMA. It is to be hoped that the fear in this instance, proceeded rather from an awakened sense of their own unworthiness, than from distrust of God's power or goodness ; from their earnest entreaties to Samuel to be their intercessor with Him.

By what peculiarly appropriate offering was their sinfulness acknowledged and atoned ?

MARY. By a " lamb," which Samuel offered for a burnt offering " *wholly* to the Lord."

MAMA. I am not sure (from our temporary omission of the details of the Jewish ceremonial law), whether you are aware of the full force of the latter expression ; that it was the usual distinction of a *sin-offering* (or atonement for national or individual transgression), to be entirely consumed on the altar of Jehovah ; while of " peace" or " free-will offerings," portions were reserved

for the consumption of the priests, and of the pious donors themselves.

What occurred, while Samuel was thus employed, to testify the acceptableness of the appointed sacrifice ?

MARY. The Lord himself “thundered with a great thunder on the Philistines, and discomfited them.” I am sure, Mama, a God that could do that, was better to the Israelites than twenty Kings !

MAMA. Aye, Mary, after such a signal display of Omnipotence, their choice of a mere human ruler, a man of like weaknesses, and “like passions” with themselves, does indeed seem puerile and preposterous ! But let not those by whom the tyranny of the world and Satan is deliberately preferred to the “free service” and “easy yoke” of Christ—imagine themselves entitled to scoff at the childish conduct of the Israelites in “desiring a King.”

Was this victory, achieved by Divine might alone—temporary, like many previous successes of the children of Israel ?

MARY. No, no ; the Philistines “were subdued, and came no more into the coast of Israel ;” and they had to give back the very cities they had taken.

MAMA. Let us learn from this impressive fact,

the widely differing nature of the final and permanent victory over our spiritual enemies achieved for every one of us by *our* Lord, and in the "power of his might"—from the slight and doubtful advantages which (in our own strength) any of us have ever been able to gain over the corruptions of human nature. A Samson himself may rise to combat the "strong man armed" within—by a vigorous effort the pillars of his iniquitous shrine may even be temporarily shaken—but God must "thunder mightily," and himself discomfit the ever rising host of sinful passions and desires, before (like the Philistines) they can be for ever "subdued;" and "come no more" into the purified precincts of the "swept and garnished" heart.

How did Samuel expressively commemorate this seasonable interposition of the Lord?

MARY. He set up "a stone," (a pillar I suppose) and called it "Eben-ezer." What did that mean?

MAMA. The "stone of help," as we read in the margin. Indeed the object is sufficiently explained by the words of Samuel, "Hitherto hath the Lord *helped* me;" and many are the similar memorials which, in the course of his earthly pilgrimage, might be "set up" in the heart, and recorded in the life and conversation of the Christian!

How long is it here said that Samuel “judged Israel?”

MARY. “All the days of his life.” It seems odd to say so of him, when we know that he lived long after he had given the people the King they were so anxious for.

MAMA. True; and therefore, instead of having any thing to do with the *duration* of his government, the expression properly refers to his unwearied diligence in the exercise of it; and should have been translated “*every* day of his life.” Was this good and active ruler content with remaining in one place, and allowing all who required justice to resort to him—like Deborah and others we read of?

MARY. No; he went a regular circuit every year through a great many cities; and “judged Israel” in all those places.

MAMA. From whence, I daresay, was originally borrowed the humane and considerate practice of modern times, by which justice is annually, or oftener, made to circulate throughout every district of our country. But where did Samuel fix its principal seat in Israel, and his own residence?

MARY. At Ramah, which was very natural; for you know he was born there.

MAMA. And by what pious act did he take care to hallow the place of his nativity?

MARY. He "built there an altar to the Lord."

MAMA. Yes; not only as a token of pious gratitude; (never omitted where they set up their earthly rest,) by the believing patriarchs, but as an indispensable requisite for the delivery of those oracles, which, through him, the Lord now vouchsafed to His inquiring people.

But how were Samuel's own parental hopes, and I think, we may almost venture to conclude, solitudes also, lamentably frustrated?

MARY. By his sons "not walking in his ways, but taking bribes, and perverting judgment." Mama, if they were such bad men, how could he think of appointing them Judges?

MAMA. You forget the blinding influence of partiality on the best of parents; besides which, it was perhaps only elevation to eminent stations which gave rise to, or drew forth the love of "filthy lucre" in these young men. Many who might have passed unblameably through an humble condition, have had cause to rue the day when temptation's golden bait seduced them from the path of rectitude. All through the east to this day, the practice of "taking bribes to pervert judgment," unhappily prevails in the most open and shameless degree. But what effect, more fatal still than their

personal ruin, had the misconduct of Samuel's sons on the people they thus iniquitously "judged?"

MARY. It gave them an excuse to ask for a King; but I daresay if the wish had not been at the bottom of their hearts, Samuel would have removed his sons, and given them better Judges.

MAMA. No doubt he would; and bitterly was his mistaken lenity towards them punished, when he saw it made the occasion of a request which "displeased Samuel," chiefly because he knew it to be eminently displeasing to God.

To whom did the old man turn for counsel in this cruel emergency?

MARY. To the Lord; and *He* saw through it at once, and said, "They have not rejected *thee*, but they have rejected *me*, that I should not reign over them."

MAMA. And does this all-seeing and justly offended God direct His servant to punish the rebels, by denying their insulting petition?

MARY. No; instead of being angry, He desires Samuel to "hearken to their voice!"

MAMA. And are you sure that His doing so was at all inconsistent with that "righteous anger," in which the same God granted "for their hurt," many a former rash desire of his people in the wilderness? Were the quails there sent, to satisfy with flesh the unthankful "loathers" of

manna—a boon from the Lord—or mere harbingers of the pestilence that swept their impious consumers away, while the food they had coveted was yet “between their teeth?” Just as the final measure of Almighty wrath against the idolatry of Ephraim, was filled up by the fearful expression of “Let him alone”—so no punishment more appropriate could have been devised for despisers and rejecters of Divine dominion, than a transfer to the sway of a succession of human rulers: the best of them weak and wayward; the greater part tyrannical and blood-thirsty; in short, “like unto the kings of the nations round about,” after whom the chosen subjects of the Most High impiously and foolishly hankered?

But great as was the insult, and justly as it would have been resented by allowing them to rush headlong into the miseries they had provoked—did He whose name is Compassion, suffer them to cast Him off, unremonstrated with and unwarned?

MARY. Oh! no; he bade Samuel “protest solemnly unto them,” and tell them exactly all they had to expect. If the kings of those days did all that he said they would do, how could the Israelites be foolish enough to desire one?

MAMA. So far from exaggerating, it is probable that Samuel did not describe, in half their

enormity, the caprices and exactions of those barous monarchs of the surrounding nations, w the children of Israel unnaturally "desired." Eastern countries (at this day of comparative lization), not only are the menial employn about the royal person here enumerated, me coveted, in preference to an honest independen but the persons as well as property of their jects are at the unlimited disposal of desj sovereigns ; whose wanton disregard of life (the case of modern Persia and Turkey, w piles of human heads not unfrequently *adorn* courts of the Sultan), makes every one a tomed to the laws and safety of Europe, shudder and rejoice. At the mere nod of or these rulers (nay of those among them whc not regarded as peculiarly sanguinary) the s or bow-string cuts off, in a moment, the hig persons in the state ; while deprivation of blessing of sight is almost the certain lot o whom relationship to the throne renders ob

Eglon king of Moab, or Jabin king of Hazron, under whom they had recently groaned—did the pitying remonstrances of God, or the passionate pleadings of Samuel, suffice to check the national frenzy?

MARY. No, no, they said, "We will have a king, that we may be like unto all the nations; that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles."

MAMA. And had the "King of kings," whom they rejected, "failed in one jot or tittle" of all these acts of rightful supremacy?

MARY. Oh! no, no; he had "raised them up judges," without number, and made them strong and wise for their sakes. He had "gone out before them" in a pillar of fire, and fought their "battles," better than a thousand kings could have done!

MAMA. Where then, do you think, are we to look for their unfounded preference of a fallible earthly sovereign over the "Lord God of Hosts?" Just in the same "evil heart of unbelief," which could find room for Baal, and Ashtaroth, and Chemosh; to the exclusion of the "Lord who brought them up out of the land of Egypt," and gave them every blessing the wildest imagination could desire! Because the worship of Jehovah in His sanctuary, had less in it of show, and of appeals

to the senses, than the idle and generally impure rites of paganism, it was daily deserted by them for what St Paul calls "the table of devils." And because the temporal dominion of the "King in Jeshurun," (like the "wind" which He commissions, and which "goeth forth where it listeth, and no one knoweth whence it cometh or whither it goeth"), was invisible in its splendours to the grovelling eye of sense, they chose rather to bask for a moment in the treacherous sunshine of royal favour; at the risk of atoning, at every moment by their lives, for the degradation they had voluntarily courted. The choice seems to us absurd and preposterous; but are there none among ourselves, in whose eyes and hearts the tinsel of an earthly court, dims and eclipses the eternal brightness of that city of our King, which "hath no need of the sun to enlighten it," and whose splendours mortal imagery is tasked in vain to express, and which human language fails to pourtray, even "through a glass darkly?"

There is one principle very evident in the conduct of the Jews, against which (as peculiarly dangerous to young persons) it may be well to take this opportunity of warning you. I mean the propensity towards idle imitation of unworthy or unsuitable models. Were the "nations round about," under whose yoke Israel had so often groaned, so

distinguished for national worth or prosperity, as to make being "like unto them," a rational object of desire?

MARY. No; for since God thought them unfit to live, they must have been shockingly sinful, and of course very unhappy.

MAMA. Apply these two tests, then, Mary, (suggested by yourself), to the conduct and circumstances of all whom, in after life, you may feel disposed to envy or imitate. If they are "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God," they cannot, whatever may be the outward glare of their prosperity, be intrinsically happy; nor would a child of God act otherwise than the foolish short-sighted Israelites, in "desiring" to "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;" in preference to the holy security and "safe-keeping" vouchsafed him by a gracious Master here, and the joys laid up in store for him at the right hand of God!

MORNING TWENTY-THIRD.

LESSON—1 Samuel, Chapters ix. and x. to verse 17.

MAMA. The consideration of the chapters we have this day been reading, scarcely entered into my original plan of terminating our present course of Scripture study, with the close of that highly favoured period during which the Israelites flourished under the direct government of God. But the formal resignation (into the hands of Him by whom it was bestowed,) of the delegated authority of Samuel—and his unanswerable appeal as to the equity of its exercise on his own part, to the people over whom he had so long presided—occurred subsequently to his privately anointing Saul to the kingly office ; and as the government of Israel by judges could not be said to cease until that resignation, and the open assumption of royal authority by the young herdsman of Benjamin—I have taken advantage of it to shew you (from the opening of his singular history) how widely different

from the ordinary procedure of mankind, was the selection by God of that monarch whom his ungrateful subjects had "desired."

One of their great and avowed objects (as we have seen) in rejecting the sway of "Him who is invisible," was to be "like unto the nations round about;" to have, like them, an earthly ruler, nobly born, dazzling with gold and splendour, and fitted, by his renown and experience in arms, to "go out before them and fight their battles." In what respects did these requisites correspond with the birth and station of Saul?

MARY. Not so ill with his birth, Mama; for it says his father was a "mighty man of power."

MAMA. This must have related to his bodily strength or stature; for Saul, not prone to depreciate himself, says his family was "the least of all the families of Benjamin." Nor (though the humble occupation of a herdsman was not then altogether disdained by the younger sons of even wealthy parents) does his personal search for the stray asses of his father augur much for his importance in the primitive household. In his lofty stature and goodly person alone, resided those external qualifications for sovereignty, which, in the unlettered regions of the east, so often supply the want of hereditary rank on intrinsic merits.

MARY. I wonder, Mama, that when God con-

descended to choose the Israelites a king himself, he did not give them a pattern one, just to shew what a king *should* be, and not a young rash head-strong lad like Saul.

MAMA. You surely do not bear in mind what we remarked yesterday, that it was in *judgment* God granted their sinful prayer for a temporal ruler; and that the unvarying declarations of His word must have "fallen to the ground," had a person exempt from the peculiar vices of sovereignty (supposing such an one to have existed) been set over them to mock and falsify it. "He who doeth all things well," did not (on the other hand) see fit to vindicate his own honour by setting over them a monster of wickedness and tyranny, such as their subsequent annals have frequently exhibited; but a fair average compound of barbarian valour and barbarian vices, such as could then be culled from among the lower ranks of an uncultivated people; brave enough to dazzle for a while the nation he lived to degrade and oppress—and sufficiently wayward in temper and disposition to make them regret, a thousand times, the mild paternal sway of the God they had rejected.

How was the young wandering herdsman directed to the prophet appointed to anoint him?

MARY. By what seemed a mere chance; be-

cause his servant thought Samuel might be able to help them to the lost asses !

MAMA. Strange indeed was that arrangement of Providence which sent him, instead of recovering a trifling loss, to be invested with a kingdom ; and joyful must indeed have seemed its result to Saul ! Yet who can doubt, that, on his thorny throne—deserted of God—his kingdom “ fallen from him”—and his mind exposed, in a peculiar manner, to the gloomy assaults of the evil one—he lived to deem, in the bitterness of his soul, his throne dearly purchased, even at the price of that “ fourth part of a shekel of silver,” which first enabled him to appear in the presence of the “ seer ?”

Why was this trifling present indispensable in his eyes, and those of his servant, before consulting Samuel ?

MARY. You have often told me that none could go empty-handed to ask a favour. What a mean idea this gives us of the great men of those days !

MAMA. Not of those days only, for the practice prevails in the same countries still. But we must not condemn rashly, on the strength of a primitive custom, originally indicative merely of respect. Do you recollect any prophet of God, as much superior to bribery in its most tempting form, as Samuel must have felt himself to the

worthless coin of the young enquirer of Benjamin ?

MARY. Oh ! yes, you know Elijah would have nothing to do with the rich gifts of Naaman ; and even Balaam pretended at first he could not disobey God for a “ house full of gold ; ” nor would he, if he had been a *right* prophet.

MAMA. True, Mary, real godliness is proof against the shocking vice of bribery ; and accordingly it is (at least in its more open forms) in a great measure banished from all countries where Christianity prevails.

MARY. Mama ! I see a thing here which rather surprises me—Samuel seems to have been sacrificing in a “ high place ” when Saul found him. I thought “ high places ” were expressly ordered by God to be taken away.

MAMA. I am very well pleased with the attention shewn by this remark to what occurred in our former reading ; though the decree and its execution rather refers to that subsequent part of the Jewish history, when such elevated sites had been perverted to the worship of false gods. In vindication of Samuel, we must observe, that though he had set up an altar at Ramah, whither the people chiefly resorted for counsel, yet that Shiloh being now desolate, and no fixed place appointed for the permanent worship of God—sacri-

fice might, not unlawfully, be offered in any city, the most conspicuous spot in which would naturally be selected for the purpose ; and such, and such only seems to have been the "high place" here mentioned as frequented by Samuel. From his coming to this city (apparently at a stated time) to sanctify with his presence and solemn rites the public festivity, it has been supposed he had the cultivation of true religion, as well as the dispensing of justice in view, in his frequent circuits throughout Israel ; and some have even referred to him the appointment and diffusion of synagogue worship among the Jews. That the rite here engaged in by Samuel was countenanced and approved by God, is evident from his accompanying it by a special revelation of his will. What was this ?

MARY. That He would send him "a man out of the land of Benjamin, to be anointed captain over Israel," and to fight for his people against the Philistines. How good of God to give them a "captain," though they had just rejected the "Lord of Hosts!"

MAMA. Yes, just like Him whose "compassions are infinite," and on whose ear the "cry," even of sinners and rebels, seldom falls in vain ! But even in the midst of "mercy" there is yet a calling to mind of "judgment ;" for we are told

that the word used by God of Saul, and translated "reigning" over His people, indicates in the original a much harsher and more absolute control ; and would be more properly (though still inadequately) rendered by "restraining" or "subduing" them.

But how unconscious alike of the great destinies awaiting him in the counsels of God, or even of the presence of His prophet, does Saul appear, when inquiring his way to the latter, of the very "seer" himself ! And how primitive and simple is the answer of the dispenser of kingdoms, and depositary of the will of the Most High ! "I am the seer ;" and his invitation to the future king of Israel to partake his hospitality ; and the circumstances of the patriarchal banquet ! It is in reading (and in the inimitable language of scripture) such traits as these, that we are transported as it were to the times and countries to which they relate, and are enabled to peruse with tenfold relish the narratives of modern travellers in the east ; by which they have been (especially of late) almost daily corroborated. An Arab Emir would at this day invite to just such a repast, and treat with just such distinctions, the European guest whom he "delighted," (after his homely fashion,) "to honour."

MARY. . Mama ! I understand (since you ex-

plained about Hannah's "worthy portion,") why Joseph gave Benjamin more to eat than the rest, as a mark of favour ; but why was the "shoulder" set before Saul ? And what is meant by "*that which was upon it* ?"

MAMA. The "shoulder" (of a lamb especially) was so prized in the east as to be esteemed, Josephus tells us, a "royal portion ;" which accounts for its having been prophetically "reserved" for Saul. And it is there served up covered, or, as we should say, *smothered* in butter and milk ; thus explaining the addition with you were naturally puzzled.

MARY. I see now that the roof of a house (as you said when speaking about Rahab) might sometimes be a private place enough, since Samuel chose it for "communing" with Saul.

MAMA. The probability is that for the same reason, viz. its privacy, as well as superior coolness, his youthful guest passed the night there ; and it is consonant to the primitive character of the whole scene, that, at the "spring of the day," (so precious and beautiful is the parching east) the present and future rulers of Israel should have taken their way on foot from the city together.

MARY. Why did Samuel send the servant away before anointing Saul ? Did the Lord not mean it to be known yet ?

MAMA. No ; else He would not so far have condescended to the customs and prejudices of a carnal people, as to manifest and ratify, by the public ceremony of casting lots, that private choice of Saul, now intimated to him and Samuel only by the typical act of anointing.

MARY. It was very generous and kindly in Samuel to “kiss” Saul, when he knew he was made head over the people instead of him and his sons ! Some people would have been jealous and envied him.

MAMA. It is refreshing to see how superior true religion enables fallible mortals to rise above the baser passions of our nature. Even Eli could cherish with unimpaired affection the infant Samuel, destined to rise on the fall of himself and his guilty race ; and, from the moment that the Divine permission (if not approbation) had sanctioned the appointment of a king—Samuel’s warm heart seems to have hailed in Saul the future champion of his beloved country.

By what minute predictions, regarding the events of his homeward journey, did he seek to confirm the wondering youth’s faith in the reality of the transaction ?

MARY. He told him all that would happen ; and, first, his being to meet three men at “Rachel’s grave.” How was it known so long after, *Mama*, when *Canaanites* had lived in the country ?

MAMA. Have you forgotten that Jacob's fond affection raised a pillar on that spot, on the confines of Benjamin, where (in sudden and fatal way-faring "travail") his beloved Rachel died ; far from the Cave of Machpelah, the purchased resting place of her kindred ?

MARY. I remember it now ; and the pillar, I daresay, was set up to make the Israelites do so too when they returned to Canaan.

MAMA. Was there any yet more striking similar memorial connected with the next stage in Saul's journey—Bethel ?

MARY. Oh ! yes, that was where God Himself appeared to Jacob and gave him all the promises ; and Jacob, I remember, on that account first called it Bethel. So when we read the other day about the people of Judah taking it and calling it "Bethel" instead of "Luz," they were only giving it back Jacob's name once more.

MAMA. Yes, Mary, and delightful it must, or ought to have been, to the chosen people, thus to gather up, and re-consecrate, the pious landmarks "set up" for them in the earthly Canaan, by those "strangers and sojourners" long since passed into a "more enduring rest." Well had it been for them had they inherited, along with the monuments, the faith of these believing patriarchs !

But what occurrence, more singular far than

the ordinary ones which preceded it, was to testify to Saul, as well as others, that the Lord had indeed "given him another heart?"

MARY. He was to meet with and prophesy along with a whole "company of prophets." I did not think that there had ever been so many at one time.

MAMA. Not if you understand the phrase of "seers," or persons endowed, like Samuel, with the power of foretelling events. But "prophe-sying" here, and in other parts of Scripture (where the "sons of the prophets" or large bodies of youths set apart for the study and teaching of Scripture are mentioned,) signifies endowment with a facility not before possessed, of composing and uttering hymns to the praise of God; and so entirely was this gift at variance with the previous life and known attainments of Saul, that the wonder it excited has passed into a proverb.

Nor was the inspiration thus afforded—though widely different, as we lately remarked, from either the prophetic spirit, or that far higher and more precious influence, by which the heart and character of man does indeed undergo a spiritual and saving change—confined to the gift of suitably praising God. It taught a naturally rash and vain-glorious youth, that rare exercise of discretion by which, when straitly questioned by his

nearest relatives on the result of his interview with Samuel (curiosity respecting which had probably been excited by the sending forward of the servant), he told not one word of that "matter of the kingdom," in the prospect of which we are sure his "natural heart" must have beat high and proudly.

Well would it have been for him had the same modest reserve and deference to Divine wisdom and authority characterized his future career; and if (even when by his own arrogance and folly, the kingdom, by the decree of the Most High, had passed from him and his race,) he had bowed under the stroke with the humility of Eli and Samuel; instead of persecuting and defying the Lord's anointed, and closing in "envy, malice, and all uncharitableness," a reign, which we have just seen opened amid kindness and blessing on the one part, and becoming obedience and humility on the other.

MORNING TWENTY-FOURTH.

LESSON—1 Samuel, Chapter x. from verse 17, and Chapter xi.

MAMA. I purposely reserved for the commencement of a new day's reading, that solemn recapitulation of all the benefits of God, and their ungrateful requital by his chosen people, by which the public inauguration of the king they madly desired, was ushered in by Jehovah ; that we may have an opportunity of seeking and finding instruction for ourselves from the long course of national evils to which the " rejection " they are here justly reproached with of God, involved the guilty Israelites. It is not by them alone, believe me Mary, that the God who " saved them out of all their adversities and tribulations," is, to this day, rejected and despised ; and when we compare even these (great and many as they were) with the " tribulation and anguish " and " eternal death," from which Christ, *our* rightful King, died to set us free, how can *we* expect to escape better than the rebellious Jews, if we shake off the only

government which ever promised us either peace or safety. Twice in their history did God proffer to them the firm yet paternal sway of Omnipotence; in his character of the Lord of Hosts, and as Messiah promised to their fathers; and twice did the infatuated nation exclaim, "We will not have thee to reign over us." We blame, nay shudder at their infatuation; but "Dost thou well to be angry?" may be the searching question of the same Omniscient Being, to every Christian, by whom the supremacy of Christ over all "principalities and powers" of this world, is not merely subscribed to in words, but acknowledged by the obedience of faith.

How did God, after having solemnly vindicated His glory, and exposed the folly of the choice made by the tribes, proceed to shew that even yet the "casting of the lot was in the lap of the Most High?"

MARY. He made all the people draw near by tribes and families (just as they did about Achan) and Saul was "taken;" but when they sought him he could not be found. Why did he hide himself?

MAMA. Apparently from some remains of the diffidence which made him shrink when first addressed by Samuel as the "desire of all Israel." But how was his place of concealment discovered?



MARY. God revealed it in answer to the people's inquiries; and when they fetched him, he was taller than any one else, from the shoulders upwards. Mama, he must have been a giant.

MAMA. Not that we hear of, but merely a man of remarkable and distinguished stature; such as carnal persons, who judged by the eye, would be prone to admire and obey. With what acclamations was he hailed by his new subjects?

MARY. They cried just as we do, "God save the King."

MAMA. Thereby acknowledging, as we ought still to do when using the same loyal expression, that it is by Him, and Him alone, that kings reign; and that all human authority (a truth too much lost sight of in these days) is derived from and upheld by God.

MARY. What does it mean that Samuel "wrote the *manner of the kingdom* in a book, and laid it up before the Lord?"

MAMA. Some, and among others the Jewish writer Josephus (a very high authority), say that it was the record of the evils denounced against Israel for desiring a king, which was thus preserved by Samuel for a memorial of the truth of his prediction; while others suppose, probably enough, that the rules and principles of the future kingly government were (after Samuel had re-

bearsed or "told" them to the people) then committed to writing.

But did all those who had witnessed the solemn inauguration of the first Jewish monarch, acquiesce in the Divine selection and appointment?

MARY. No; a band of men whose "hearts God touched," went home with him; but children of Belial (that means wicked persons, does it not?) said, "How shall this man save us?" Mama, this was despising not Saul, but God who had chosen him!

MAMA. And in what but contempt of the Lord and his "anointed," in a far higher and holier sense—has the guilt of "men of Belial" (or servants of Satan) in all ages consisted? But was it in mere disparaging expressions that this contempt was now manifested?

MARY. Oh, no; they brought Saul "no presents," and that was not treating him like a King, when you know he was ashamed to go near Samuel (who was only a Judge) without one.

MAMA. And did Saul, as might have been expected from one of his age and temper, immediately resent and punish this disrespect?

MARY. No; "he held his peace." But surely, Mama, he could hardly have felt himself to be a King yet, after all that had happened; for, in the next chapter, he was still "coming after the

herd out of the field." How strange for a King to be keeping cattle !

MAMA. You forget how long after *his* anointing, Saul's successor David, kept sheep, an undistinguished, unaspiring shepherd boy. But Saul's election wanted as yet one important confirmation, which we overlooked in our former summary of the events predicted to him by Samuel. For what indispensable ceremony, accompanying all public national engagements among the Jews, did he bid Saul "tarry at Gilgal?"

MARY. Till *he* should come down to him, and offer "burnt-offerings, and sacrifices of peace-offerings." Oh ! I see now that Saul was not fairly King till this was done ; but I wonder why Samuel sent the people away, "every one to his house," from Mizpeh, and let Saul go home to Gibeah, without it.

MAMA. The only reason which, at this distance of time, can be assigned for the delay, is the additional honour which would accrue to Jehovah and to the King he had "set up" to defend His people, by the blending of national gratitude for victory over the Ammonites, with the sacrifices designed to commemorate the accession of Saul. And this no doubt would lend them in the eyes of the people tenfold solemnity and interest.

But we must inquire into the occasion and cir

cumstances of this early triumph of one, who was still, in the estimation of some of his proud countrymen, but the simple herdsman of Benjamin. Over what insolent heathen monarch was the conquest achieved?

MARY. Nahash the Ammonite. You told me once the Ammonites were descendants of Lot, and ought to have known better than to hurt the children of Abraham.

MAMA. True; yet they chose to manifest their unbrotherly hostility, at the time of the Israelites' utmost distress in the wilderness; for which reason God, in His wrath, severed all future bonds of possible amity between them by declaring, that there "should not enter an Ammonite into the house of the Lord for ever."

But what slavish agreement were the pusillanimous men of Jabesh ready to have made with the enemy of their nation and their God?

MARY. They said, "make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee." Surely he must have been mocking, Mama, when he answered he would do it, on condition that he might "thrust out all their right eyes!"

MAMA. Putting out the eyes, barbarous as it naturally appears to us, is so common a form of tyranny in the east, where (horrible to relate) *basins full* of human eyes have been presented to

glut the vengeance of even modern kings of Persia—that the proposal to limit the mutilation to *one* eye, seems almost to have appeared mercy to the terrified inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead. But why do you suppose was the sacrifice of the right eye insisted on by their oppressor?

MARY. I am sure I don't know.

MAMA. Because it would incapacitate them as tributaries, from all future resistance with bows and arrows, (the then prevailing mode of warfare); while it still left them capable of “serving him” (according to their own abject expression) as slaves. By what expedient did the elders of the unfortunate city of Jabesh endeavour to procure deliverance?

MARY. They sent messengers for help to all the coasts of Israel; but I daresay Nahash thought they would send in vain, else he would not have given them seven days respite.

MAMA. No: and it was therefore as much his arrogant defiance of the God of Israel, as his cruelty to His people, which was so signally avenged by Saul. How, did we say, was this hitherto untried warrior employed, when the pitiful tidings from Jabesh reached his native city of Gibeah?

MARY. Following the herd out of the field. And when he heard the people weep, he asked

what ailed them ; and the “ spirit of God came upon him, and his anger was kindled greatly.”

MAMA. You remember what we remarked in the case of Samson, as to the precise meaning of the “ spirit of God” here.

MARY. Yes ; you told me it meant supernatural strength and courage ; and without both, Saul (the frightened lad who had “ hid himself among the stuff” for fear of being king), would never have talked and acted so like one, all of a sudden. But, Mama, Saul’s hewing the oxen in pieces, and sending them about, puts me in mind of the poor Levite’s wife, though it is not half so shocking.

MAMA. It at least proves to you, that his expedient (shocking as it seemed), was not unusual or unprecedented. But there is this remarkable difference between them, viz. that while the lamentable spectacle afforded by the mutilated remains of the injured woman were designed to excite compassion,—the object of Saul was to assert authority and awaken fear, and the desired effect seems, in both cases, to have been attained ; for while the “ heart of the children of Israel was knit as one man” to avenge the wrongs of the Levite, we read here that the “ people came out with one consent,” to follow the summons of Saul.

How numerous were the forces thus assembled at the call of the youthful king ?

MARY. Three hundred thousand men of Israel, besides thirty thousand of Judah. What a number to fight for one town ! Well might Saul send word to the men of Jabesh, that by the time the sun was hot on the morrow, they should have " help !"

MAMA. Or rather " deliverance," as the word is more properly rendered. And truly it must have been timely as well as acceptable, for it was on the " morrow" that the trembling victims had agreed to come out to submit to the conditions proposed by the cruel king of Ammon. But what other discomfiture awaited that insolent tyrant and his army ?

MARY. Saul divided his people into three companies, and they slew the Ammonites from the morning watch till the heat of the day, and they that remained were so scattered that not two of them were left together.

MAMA. You see now why the Almighty, after graciously vouchsafing to lend His sanction to the appointment of Saul to be king over His people, saw fit to precede, by so signal a mark of His favour and countenance, the confirmation of his newly assumed power by sacrifice. And if any thing could have added to the reputation which the valour of Saul (aided as it had been by the power of the Most High), had acquired for him

with his new subjects—it would have been the trait of generosity towards avowed and personal enemies, which formed so pleasing a contrast with the after features of his unhappy and suspicious life.

What was his behaviour, when the indignant people invoked vengeance on the despisers of his youthful authority?

MARY. He said, “There shall not a man be put to death;” and the reason shewed him pious as well as forgiving, because “the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel.” Mama! I wonder Saul could ever grow wicked!

MAMA. Would that his were the only promise, of excellence in youth, which riper years have failed to bring to maturity; or rather which the snares and seductions of an evil world have sufficed to choke and extirpate! Untried and unshaken, the “mountain” of man’s virtue as well as prosperity seems often to “stand strong;” but no sooner does the world smile or God frown, than both (though from widely differing causes) are too easily “moved.” Had any one predicted to Saul, when in the overflowings of boyish magnanimity, he would not hear of the death of even “men of Belial,” that he should live to take advantage (at the suggestion of Satan) of the compassionate “ministering” of David “to a mind diseased,” to aim a deadly weapon at his innocent heart—he would

have asked, like Hazael, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" As well might a prophet of evil have whispered to him, amidst the elation of the victory over Nahash, and the fervour of his youthful devotion to the Lord, that, forsaken of the same God, and having survived alike his honour and kingdom, he should miserably court death on the mountains of Gilboa, from the sword of his own servant! So true is it that we know not what a day, the short but chequered day of human life, may bring forth; and so just is the inference drawn from thence by him who had most largely tasted of its vanity, "Boast not thyself of to-morrow!" It is only while upheld in our integrity or our prosperity by an unerring support, that we can answer a moment for either; and surely, in creatures so dependent and powerless, self-confidence (the early rock of Saul) must prove equally ruinous and absurd. Who, when he yet joined in humble deference the name of Samuel with his own in his summons to the people, and bowed in reverential gratitude, while the gray-haired and privileged "Seer" offered peace-offerings for his elevation, to their common Lord—could have foreseen, that ere one short year of sovereignty had shed its perverting influence over his head, he would have sacrilegiously invaded that very

“ Seer’s” pontifical office, and taken on him to suspend, with ill-judged and vainglorious mercy, the positive sentence of God against a heathen foe ; while on another and later occasion, he lightly doomed to death his only son for an inadvertent error ?

When tempted to feel confidence in yourself, or in any human being, left to the uncontrolled waywardness of a fallen nature—contrast Saul at the altar of Gilgal, giving all the glory of his wonderful victory to the Lord—with the same Saul gliding like a thief in the borrowed robes of guilt, to transgress the very law of God he was “ set up” to enforce, and seek counsel from spirits of darkness in the cave of Endor !

We may, perhaps, at a future period, resume the history of his unhappy reign, on which our plan at present forbids us to enter. In the meantime its chief particulars have, I know, been long familiar to you ; sufficiently so to derive from them the instruction I have been endeavouring to impress, of the fallibility of all human resolutions, and the seductive tendency of all earthly greatness. To this we may add one more, deducible from the concluding verse of the chapter before us, viz. the ignorance of short-sighted mortals of all which concerns their true happiness.

“ All the men of Israel, and Saul,” it is here

said, "rejoiced greatly," and why? The former at having exchanged for the equitable dominion of the unchangeable Jehovah, the caprices of the most mutable and fallible of his creatures. The latter at having left the peaceful cares of the herd in his father's fields, for a career whose opening took place, as we have seen, amid strife and bloodshed, whose middle course was embittered by sin and suspicion, and its close poisoned by horror and remorse. So little (as the wise King of Israel remarks) does "man know what is good for him, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow!"

MORNING TWENTY-FIFTH.

LESSON—1 Samuel, Chapter xii.

MAMA. We are now arrived, my dear Mary, at that solemn concluding act of the direct Divine government (or Theocracy, as it is called, of the Israelites), in which Samuel, the last and best of the Judges, successively “raised up” to be the organs of God’s sovereignty among them, having assembled the people over whom he had so long presided—first affectionately appealed to themselves for a testimony to the integrity of his past life; and then assumed (from the unanswerableness of the challenge thus triumphantly made), the right to “reason” or expostulate with them on the higher theme of the greatness and goodness of that God whose dominion they had idly abjured.

By what compliance, (sinful in itself, had it not, for their chastisement, been expressly and judiciously sanctioned by God), had Samuel, now superseded his own authority, and gratified a fickle ungrateful people?

MARY. "Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a King over you."

MAMA. Yes, Mary; an act of self-devotion, easy, no doubt, to one grown old in the faithful and toilsome service of his country, but which, "old and gray-headed" as he then was, Samuel must have lived long enough to see repented of by many of those who had been most clamorous for it; and which he was even spared to annul on the part of the Lord, by the anointing of one more "after his own heart," to sit on the early forfeited throne of Saul.

But Samuel's office is not now to predict the future, but to dwell on, and recapitulate the past. How long did he say he had "walked before them?"

MARY. "From my childhood unto this day." You know he was a prophet, and in favour with God and man from a child.

MAMA. Yes—thus rewarding, far beyond all earthly distinctions, or even beyond any solace which might have been afforded her by his dutiful behaviour in private life, the piety of that mother who had early dedicated him to God. Before whom was Samuel content to call Israel "to witness?"

MARY. "Before the Lord;" and he was not

afraid, even before Him, to ask "whose ox, or whose ass, he had taken," or "whom he had defrauded," or "of whom he had taken a bribe to blind his eyes with." Mama! I fear his sons had taken many.

MAMA. And for that very reason were they now reduced to the condition of private, and justly despised persons in Israel; obnoxious (but for the shield thrown over them by their father's spotless character) to the prosecution of all whom they had injured. Perhaps it was with a view to the indirect redressing of even *their* misdeeds, that Samuel offered to make restitution of any unconscious invasion of the property of others. Was any such, however, alleged against him?

MARY. Oh, no! the people answered, "Thou hast not defrauded us, neither oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought at any man's hand." And they both took God to witness that it was so.

MAMA. How well would it be for us, Mary, could *any* among us at the close of a moderately long life (one exempt too, from the peculiar snares and temptations of sovereignty), thus fearlessly call on the Judge of heaven and earth, to attest our integrity towards our fellow mortals! From acts of open violence and spoliation, there is little merit in our case in abstaining; but by whom have the morals, the happiness, the good name, of their

brethren, been, from the cradle to the grave, religiously respected? Alas! by how many idle examples, and idle words, are the former too often endangered and the latter injured, by those who would count "oppression" unmanly, and "defrauding" a heinous sin! To stand with clean hands at the tribunal of even fellow-mortals, is rare in a world where fraud and over-reaching too often usurp the names of skill and dexterity; but to be able, with *clean hearts*, confidently to ask, "Whose principles have I shaken by precept or example? or whose welfare have I diminished by unkindness, inadvertence, or even neglect?" is a privilege which the most conscientious Christian would perhaps be the last to arrogate to himself; and yet how easily would this invaluable source of consolation for old age be purchased by a very moderate exercise of Christian recollection and self-denial? Were the negative principle of "cease to do evil," acted upon, in its mere partial sense of abstaining from rash censures and unadvised talk, from how many calamities, occasioned by "firebrands" thrown "in sport," would society be delivered; and from how many snares sown in it by the recklessness of persons, older (but not wiser) than themselves, would the path of the young be happily made free!

But having established his own right to do so,

in what especial character did Samuel plead, or rather "reason," in behalf of the God of Israel?

MARY. As the God that brought their fathers forth out of the Land of Egypt, and "made them dwell in that place."

MAMA. And how did he say this God had, even by *them*, been requited?

MARY. They "forgot the Lord their God;" and *then* he says he "sold them into the hand" of all the wicked men we have read of,—"*Sisera, and the Philistines, and the king of Moab.*"

MAMA. And what is the humbling and salutary effect ascribed by Samuel to these "righteous acts" of a justly incensed, yet merciful God?

MARY. "They cried unto the Lord, and said, We have sinned, because we have forsaken the Lord, and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth; but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve thee."

MAMA. Was there any failure on the side of Jehovah in executing His part in this oft broken covenant?

MARY. Oh, no! he sent Jerubbaal, and Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies, and they "dwelt safe."

MAMA. And was the first improvement of the safety, thus miraculously purchased, a return in sincerity to their alienated God?

MARY. I think they generally “served him” as long as the judge who delivered them lived; but no sooner was *he* taken away than back they went to their idols again.

MAMA. And by what crowning act of ingratitude had they now appropriately summed up a course of shameless impiety and revolt?

MARY. They said “Nay, but a king shall reign over us, when the Lord their God was their king.” How *could* they want or wish for another?

MAMA. Just as in the spirit of childish imitation, you “want or wish for” many things possessed by others, as unsuitable to your age, and as inferior to those you would ignorantly barter for them, as the regal government was unfitted for the polity of the Jews, or as the rash fallible mortal “desired” by them was contemptible, when set in competition with the King of Kings. But the “desire” having (as we before saw) been for its own punishment, complied with—on what conditions were they and their sovereign to enjoy the undeserved favour of God?

MARY. If they would both “fear the Lord and not rebel against his commandment.” Mama, you know the book of Kings was little better than a history of their “rebellions” against God; and from Jeroboam down, they almost all made, or worshipped idols!

MAMA. And what denunciation (here solemnly recorded) did we find fearfully accomplished in the disastrous close of the Jewish history?

MARY. "The hand of the Lord shall be against you, as it was against your fathers."

MAMA. And how was that? What judgments, unexampled in the history of a nation, vindicated the truth of "Him who cannot lie?"

MARY. Oh! they had famines, and wars, and were carried captives, and sold into slavery; and Jerusalem was twice destroyed, and the ten tribes (you told me) were utterly swept away.

MAMA. This is easily and lightly said, Mary! and thus do a few brief, but awful words, sum up the predicted misfortunes of the rebellious people of God. May we not have traced in vain, for our improvement and humiliation, the correspondence between their unerring fulfilment in our former course of Scriptural reading, and their awful purport as recorded here!

By what "great thing" was the steadfast word of Jehovah attested and solemnized in the eyes of a wondering people?

MARY. God sent thunder and rain, at the prayer of Samuel, in the "time of wheat harvest." Why should *this* make the Israelites "perceive that their wickedness was great in desiring a king?"

MAMA. Because it would afford a direct miraculous testimony to the truth and solemnity of the censures just passed on the ungrateful Israelites by the courageous Samuel. Did you not once, yourself wonder that Jordan should be said to "overflow its banks all harvest;" a season, you remarked, of severe drought even among ourselves?

MARY. Yes, but you told me it was spring when *barley* harvest took place, and that snow melting in the mountains, and not rain, made the river swell.

MAMA. I am glad you remembered this; and as the phrase, "former and latter rain," occurs so frequently in Scripture, I am glad too, to take this opportunity of explaining why any deviation from their usual periods, could hardly have happened in Judea but by miracle. The "former" rain (so called contrary to the place *we* should assign it in the calendar) falls at the end of summer, to refresh the earth after the parching droughts of that totally *showerless* season (the "*wheat harvest*" of our chapter), and prepare it for the sowing of winter pulse. And the "latter" rain, occurring usually about the middle of April, is equally indispensable to bring to maturity the grain, which would otherwise infallibly perish in so dry and arid a climate. You will see from

this uniform arrangement of Providence, the propriety of the frequent reference to God in Scripture, as the giver or withholder of the "former and latter rain;" while the extreme rarity of rain in summer (the period of "wheat harvest" in Judea) will make you understand why its appearance now, and in so violent and destructive a form, would both rebuke the presumption of the Israelites, and deepen their sense of dependence on an offended God, for not only the comforts, but absolute necessities of life. How poor and powerless, amid the thunders of Jehovah, and that unseasonable "opening of the windows of heaven," by which (if not graciously stopped) their hopes of plenty would have been speedily annihilated, must have seemed to them the fellow worm whom they had exalted at the expense of the Creator of heaven and earth! How do we find this humbling consciousness manifested?

MARY. "All the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel."

MAMA. And what needful service, infinitely beyond the power and province of an earthly monarch, did they implore the "man of God" to perform in their behalf?

MARY. "Pray for thy servants unto the Lord that we die not; for we have added unto all our sins this evil to ask us a king."

MAMA. And does Samuel, even in consoling them and granting their request, for a moment extenuate the evil thus tardily admitted?

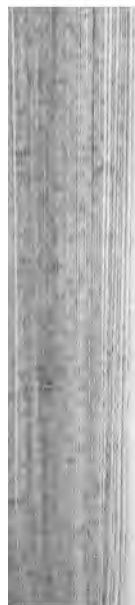
MARY. Oh! no; though he says "Fear not," yet he does not deny that they had "done all this wickedness."

MAMA. Let us attend to and improve, my dear Mary, as the most appropriate conclusion we can draw, from a most instructive course of reading, the order, as well as the tenor, of the admonitions here delivered by Samuel to his guilty countrymen. To the Christian, overwhelmed with a sense of conscious unworthiness, may be said on the same Divine authority, and with the yet more endearing sanction of a gospel message, "Fear not." But the example of Samuel may deter the Christian teacher from drawing his encouragement from a mitigated view of the evil of sin. His ground of hope, like Samuel's, must be holier as well as higher. "For His own great name's sake," will he argue, and for the sake of the "only name given under heaven by which men can be saved," "your God will not forsake his people;" and this, amid a sense (which no friend to your soul would wish less) of prevailing "wickedness," is your warrant and your encouragement to "follow on, if haply ye may attain," to serve him more acceptably in future.

Thus “reasoned” and thus exhorted Samuel; and, in the spirit of Paul, when he said, “Woe is laid on me if I preach not the gospel,” thus did charity prompt him to add, “God forbid that I should *sin against the Lord* in ceasing to pray for you!” Cease to rule over them he might (and that by their own ingratitude), but cease to carry them on his heart to a Throne of Grace, this the aged prophet recoiled from, as from sacrilege! Let us, while admiring and treasuring up the words of age and wisdom, find in them something which, even in youth, we may adopt and imbibe, viz. that Love, which “seeketh not her own things” merely, but the good, the eternal good, of others also; and remember that, while it belongs to manhood to act, and to experience to admonish, prayer is a boon not denied to the lips of childhood; and one which, “God forbid,” children should “sin” by withholding from those whom they are bound thus to remember before God.

We have now brought to a conclusion a most interesting part of Scripture; nor will it be possible to close it more appropriately or usefully than with the impressive words of Samuel:—“Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart, *for consider what great things He hath done for you.*”

END.



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